FALL 2006

SMALL FARM QUARTERLY

Good Living and Good Farming – Connecting People, Land, and Communities

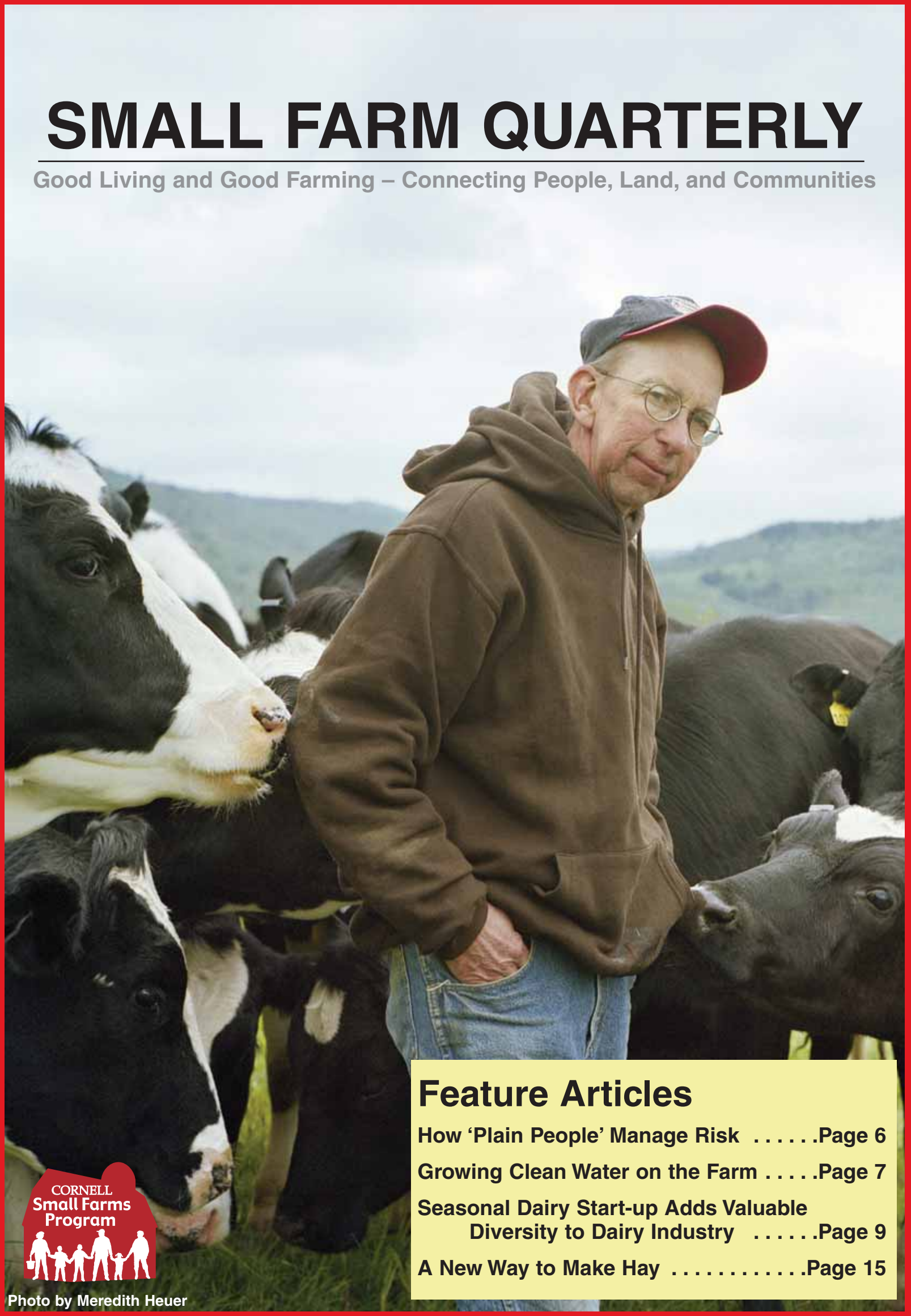

Photo by Meredith Heuer

Feature Articles

Supplement to Country Folks

SMALL FARM QUARTERLY - Fall 2006

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On our cover: Small dairy operator Tom Hutson is the first NY farmer to receive American Farmland Trust's prestigious Steward of the Land Award. (Full story on Page 7.) Photo by Meredith Heuer.

SMALL FARM QUARTERLY

Good Farming and Good Living — Connecting People, Land, and Communities

Small Farm Quarterly is for farmers and farm families — including spouses and children - who value the quality of life that smaller farms provide.

OUR GOALS ARE TO:

- Celebrate the Northeast region's smaller farms;
- Inspire and inform farm families and their supporters;
- Help farmers share expertise and opinions with each other; and
- Increase awareness of the benefits that small farms contribute to society and the environment.
- Share important research, extension, and other resources.

Small Farm Quarterly is produced by Lee Publications, Inc., and is distributed four times a year as a special section of *Country Folks*. Volume 4 publication dates: July 10 and October 10, 2006; January 8 and April 10, 2007

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Cornell Small Farms Program Update

With the flurry of summer field days, pasture walks, and Empire Farm Days coming to a close, there is a new hustle and bustle here as students return to the Cornell campus. It's great to see how many are interested in the Small Farms Club and other farm-related activities here like Dilmun Hill Student Organic farm. If these students are an indicator, there is a very bright future for small farms in the Northeast!

SMALL FARMS CLUB OFF AND RUNNING
The Club had its first meeting in early September and, by the time you're reading this, will have held an apple-picking farm tour and will be busy selling Halloween pumpkins and gourds on campus as a fundraiser for future farm tours. There is a whole new crop of freshmen club members with big ideas and lots of energy, so stay tuned for more!

GET YOUR SPIFFY SMALL FARMS T-SHIRT!
Now you can tell the world how you feel about small farms while supporting our Program. T-shirts are beige, 100% organic cotton. Adult S,M,L, or XL are $15; kids' size 12 just $12. To order send a check along with your complete address and phone number, and the size T-shirt(s) you want, to: Small Farms Program, 135C Plant Science Building, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14853.

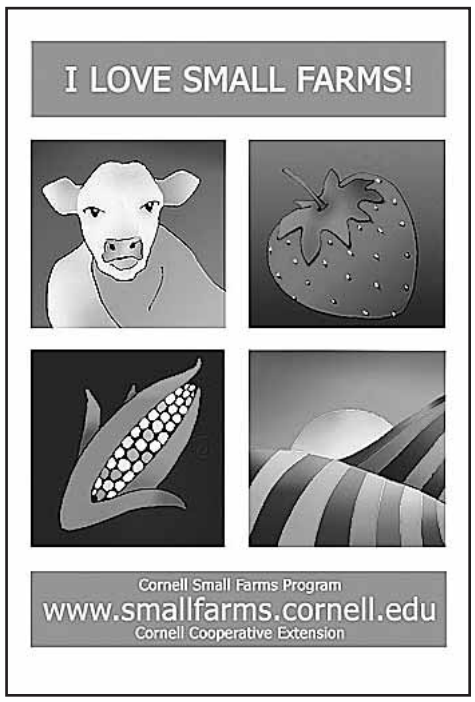
4-H TEENS EXPLORE THE SMALL FARM DREAM
In late June the Small Farms Program hosted fourteen 4-H teens from eleven NYS counties in a 3-day session on "Exploring the Small Farm Dream," as part of 4-H Career Exploration Days at Cornell. It was great fun and a wonderful learning experience for us all.

On the first day the group met with Christy Marshall, Director of FSA Loan Operations for NYS and heard from teens Katie and Brittany Nellis about their FSA Rural Youth Loans. Then they heard from Steve Richards of NY FarmNet/FarmLink Program about planning and starting up or transferring a farm business. Cornell Animal Science student Betsy Howland talked eloquently about her life on a small dairy farm in Tioga County, and Janet Buonnano talked about learning opportunities at Dilmun Hill Student Organic Farm.

On the second day we hit the road for Cayuga County, visiting with Chris and Kim Grant at Indian Chimney Farm in Groton; Nevin Martin and his family at Hillcrest Dairy milk and cheese processing plant in Moravia; Kevin and Barb Ziemba at ZiemBarbWay Farm in Aurora; and Lou and Mervie Lego at Elderberry Pond Farm and Restaurant in Aurora.

The third and last day, the teens reflected on what they'd learned and wrote short articles for this issue of Small Farm Quarterly. You can read all about what they learned on the Youth Pages.

SMALL FARM GRANTS PROGRAM
Our mini-grants program supports Extension educators in developing educational projects that specifically target and engage local small farm businesses. All 2005-6 grants projects were completed by the end of September. Grants projects for 2006-7 will continue our focus on developing farmer-to-farmer discussion groups and mentoring programs, and producing fact sheets for the small farm audience. You can find reports on previous year's projects at www.smallfarms.cornell.edu. Look under "Projects."



RISK MANAGEMENT COMMUNICATIONS
We've been delighted to have the help of Craig Cramer, Communications Specialist in the Department of Horticulture and former Editor of New Farm Magazine, who has coordinated a series of excellent articles focusing on risk management. You may have noticed them peppered throughout the last several issues of Small Farm Quarterly. This project was funded by the New York Crop Insurance Education Program under the Risk Management Agency (USDA) and the NYS Department of Agriculture & Markets, and assisted by a number of talented Extension- and farmer-authors.

We'll bring you further updates on our Beginning Farmer Initiative, NYS Organic Dairy Initiative, and Small Dairy Extension Innovation Project next time!

NON-DAIRY LIVESTOCK

Old Fashioned Rape Pasture System Offer Fresh Possibilities for Pastured Pork

By Bill Henning

Worldwide we are facing an ever-escalating crunch as unbridled demand for energy outpaces dwindling affordable supplies. The growing demand for energy will increase all costs, and not the least of which will be in farming. We have already witnessed evidence of alternative cost cutting measure that prove to be as profitable, if not more profitable, than many 'main stream' production schemes.

Looking back in time might offer us some practices we can integrate into more appropriate modern production systems, systems that are healthy, profitable, bucolic, and sustainable. One example can be found in the July 1919 issue of the Genesee County Farm Bureau News. It reads:

RAPE'S GREATEST VALUE IS FOR USE AS PASTURAGE
As Annual Forage Crop for Swine It Cannot Be Surpassed – Not Easily Killed

The greatest usefulness of the rape plant lies in its value for pasturing. As an annual forage crop for swine it cannot be surpassed. Before being pastured by hogs or lambs it should be allowed to attain a growth of nine to twelve inches. Usually it is not easily killed by trampling or grazing and if not pastured too closely will remain green and succulent until frozen. If rainfall is abundant late in the season, rape may be successfully seeded in corn at the last cultivation and furnish abundant fall pasturage.

GAINS ON RAPE PASTURE
Data from the Ohio station indicate that pigs on rape pasture will gain practically as fast and require no more concentrate per 100 pounds of grain if from five to seven instead of 10% of tankage (animal by-products) is used in the ration. From weaning time until two hundred pounds is reached an allowance of twenty-five hundredths to three tenths of a pound tankage, or its equivalent in some other high protein feed will not be far wrong, and will give good results.

CARRYING CAPACITY OF RAPE
Many factors, of course, influence the yield and therefore determine the number of animals that can be carried. This green forage crop is at best a supplement. When spring pigs are full fed an acre of rape may be estimated to carry eighteen to twenty pigs from June until the close of the grazing season. If the concentrated ration is limited to say three fourths of a full feed an acre will carry from twelve to fifteen pigs.
Genesee County Farm Bureau News, July 1919

INTEGRATING THE PAST INTO THE FUTURE
There has been a significant increase in demand for organic or natural pork from older breeds of swine that do better under lower cost management systems. The National Pork Board's own survey (www.nichepork.org) indicates that between 40 and 80% of pork consumers in the US would prefer organic or natural pork. This production requires pasture systems in season.

Rape can be incorporated into a crop rotation as a break point between alfalfa seedings. Alfalfa is a perennial high quality pasture crop for hogs. However, alfalfa seedings cannot be made without an alternate crop being planted in between the two alfalfa seedings.

Tankage is not allowed in natural and organic hog feeding. As the article states, there are alternatives. Today we know much more about the specific amino acids requirements for growing swine and these can be accurately met with appropriate ingredients.

In many cases, organic or natural production systems cost less to start and operate. Hogs harvest more of their own feed and spread more of their manure. Ventilation is natural and the environment is healthier. And by the way, natural and organic pork products command premium prices.

Our forefathers bequeathed us many time proven production practices that have been forfeited with the adoption of newer technologies. Now might be the opportune time to see how the new and the old, combined, can provide the best of all worlds.

Bill Henning and his wife Kathleen operate a grass-based beef and sheep farm in the Finger Lakes region of New York. He is also the Small Farms Specialist with PRO-DAIRY/CCE-NWNY Dairy, Livestock, and Field Crops Team.

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MANAGING RISK

Taming the 'Three D's'

How to Keep Death, Disability, and Divorce from Threatening Your Farm Business

By Mariane Kiraly

Editor's note: This article is part of a series focusing on risk management funded by the New York Crop Insurance Education Program under the Risk Management Agency (USDA) and the NYS Department of Agriculture & Markets.

Your farm business faces risks every day. Bad weather can take a crop. Low prices can steal your profits. Or lightening can burn down your barn.

While you have little control over weather and markets, you still take actions to protect your family and your farm from the unexpected. You buy crop or fire insurance to protect your investments. You lock-in fertilizer prices or loan rates so rising costs don't eat into earnings. It's just a sensible way to do business.

Unfortunately, there are other risks that claim many farms each year because they aren't recognized as threats – or because many of us find it difficult or unpleasant to even talk about them, much less plan for how we can minimize them. I call them the "3 D's" – death, disability and divorce.

YOU CAN'T TAKE IT WITH YOU

Who likes to think or talk about death? Along with taxes, death is inevitable. But most farmers put off measures to ensure the farm will continue should they die. Since farming is a very dangerous occupation and most farmers are 55 or older, death is an important issue to face.

Untimely or not, there are things you can do to assure that your farm will live on: Meet with bankers and insurers to make sure that debt will be covered by life insurance and survivors can continue farming.

Plan for living expenses for survivors. While our Social Security system is a backup for those who are vested in the system, survivors' benefits will at best maintain only basic living expenses. Term life insurance is relatively cheap and can be discontinued when no longer needed.

Make sure successors know the farm business details, where important papers are stored, how the books are kept, and the financial status of the business.
Have an updated and comprehensive will to provide instructions to survivors and make business transitions easier after a death.

New York FarmLink is an excellent resource when making decisions regarding farm transitions. Readers living in New York State can take advantage of the program's free consultation for business, retirement and estate planning. Contact Steve Richards: 800-547-3276, email info@nyfarmlink.org, or visit the FarmLink website: nyfarmlink.org.

DEALING WITH DISABILITY

Stop and think what would happen to your farm business if you or another family member faced disability due to an accident, disease or illness. Without a plan in place, your farm could be forced out of business.

Insurance products can reduce the financial risk associated with replacing a key "labor resource." (Using more personal terms, that's you or another family member.) Some farmers carry disability insurance. Check with your insurance company on rates as this kind of insurance historically has been relatively inexpensive.

In this time of escalating medical costs, buying health insurance is an important risk management tool. You can reduce the risk of disability by purchasing health insurance and using it well. Many health problems can be prevented or mitigated by regular check-ups. If this prevents a disability or eliminates thousands of dollars to diagnose and treat a health problem, the cost of the health insurance is money well spent and will ultimately reduce expenditures on healthcare. Many states have programs to help farmers find affordable health insurance. See "Get Help with Health Insurance" in the Summer 2006 issue of Small Farm Quarterly for more information.

You can also lower risks of injury and disability by having machinery in top working order with all safety features in place. Many times when making repairs, you may remove guards and be tempted not replace them. Don't fall into that trap -- literally. Old tractors without modern safety features are a safety liability on farms. It is better to replace a tractor than risk injury or death.

The Northeast Center for Agricultural Medicine and Health (NYCAMH) is a great resource for farmers when considering the safety of their machinery. Phone 800-343-7527, email nycamh@lakenet.org or visit their website at: www.nycamh.com.

Some disabled farmers are still able to assist in the management of a farm business, but are not able to do the physical work. Enlist assistance from New York AgrAbility Project to find out how they can be of assistance with home and barn modifications for the disabled. Contact Holly Cestero: 877-257-9777, email hjc26@cornell.edu or visit their website at: www.diaglab.vet.cornell.edu/aghealth/agrability.

INVEST IN RELATIONSHIPS

Divorce is another unpleasant topic, but it should not be overlooked as a risk that can ruin a farm business. Divorce settlements and associated legal fees can be very large for a farm business to manage. This is not to say that a deserving spouse should not receive what is fair. But the manner of payments might make or break the farm.

However unromantic, many problems can be prevented with a pre-nuptial agreement. The agreement can be worded so that installments are paid over the course of several years to settle a divorce. Use your trusted family lawyer who knows the family and farm business to help you work out a prenuptial agreement.

If your betrothed only sees you away from the farm, they are in for a shock once the honeymoon is over. Make sure a prospective spouse understands the demands of being a farmer and spends a good deal of time on the farm before committing to marriage.

Be sure to spend quality time with your spouse and family. Invest as much time, energy and love in them as you do in your farm. Take time to get away from the farm occasionally. Vacations and outings need not be lengthy or expensive. But they can help you gain a better perspective on your work, and a healthy perspective can help provide the glue that maintains lasting relationships.

If you need help solving marriage or other family issues, don't be bashful about asking for help. Seek expertise from a personal, marriage or family counselor. For New Yorkers, NY FarmNet has a trained group of counselors who are ready to help. Contact Ed Staehr: 800-547-3276, email nyfarmnet@cornell.edu or visit their website at HYPERLINK "http://www.nyfarmnet.org" www.nyfarmnet.org.

You may still not like the idea of talking about the "3 D's." But as you can see, there are a lot of resources available to help you treat these risks the same way that you treat other farming risks – by planning how you can avoid the risk as much as possible and minimizing their effects should they occur.

Yes, managing risks takes some time and attention. But the benefits – including your own peace of mind – outweigh the costs in the long run.

Mariane Kiraly is a dairy farm business management educator with Cornell Cooperative Extension, Delaware Co.

FOREST AND WOODLOT

Reducing Recreation Liability Risk

When People Come Onto Your Land to Play, Make Sure You Don't Have to Pay.

By Gary Goff & Tommy Brown

Editor's note: This article is part of a series focusing on risk management funded by the New York Crop Insurance Education Program under the Risk Management Agency (USDA) and the NYS Department of Agriculture & Markets. The information in this article does not substitute for good legal advice. We suggest that you discuss your concerns with your attorney and insurance agent.

We live in a lawsuit-prone society. What would happen if a snowmobiler is seriously injured cutting through your land? Or a trespasser is pinned in the collapse of a dilapidated outbuilding? Or a hunter accidentally shoots someone on your property?

Could any of these result in a lawsuit that could threaten your farm?

The answer is, of course: "It depends." But there are practical steps you can take to reduce your liability in the event someone using your property for recreational purposes gets hurt.

In general, the law is on your side – assuming you are a reasonable and responsible landowner. Every Northeast state has recreational-use statutes. These laws recognize that landowners who allow others to use their land for recreation are providing a public service. The intent of these laws is to encourage landowners to allow recreational activities on their lands by limiting the liability of those who do so.

These statutes vary in some aspects from state to state, but are very similar in many ways. Understanding the basics of these statutes will help you decide whether to allow various uses of your land, and then help you manage your remaining liability to anyone using your land for recreation, including trespassers.

Aside from granting access as a good neighbor, there are several mutually beneficial reasons to allow recreation on your land. For example, recreational hunting or trapping can help you manage nuisance wildlife such as deer, geese, muskrats, and beaver. If harvesting timber is an objective, allowing visitors to remove low-grade trees (non-commercial firewood cutting is covered by limited liability statutes in some states) can improve growth of higher value trees. The periodic presence of neighbors and friends on your land can discourage trespassers and unwanted activities.

GET RID OF HAZARDS

"Limited liability statutes" cover all non-commercial (free access) recreation activities in most states, with the notable exception that the New York law does not cover swimming. In some states, covered recreational activities also include gleaning, gathering wood, and improving the land for a given activity. (See the online Table of State Liability Laws listed in the Resource Spotlight for the statute in your state.)

The extent of your liability generally varies depending on whether or not you allow access "free of charge." Maine law allows some payment to owners if it is not for exclusive access to the property and if the use is not primarily commercial. Massachusetts law allows a voluntary contribution to be made to the owner. In other states any payment voids the limited liability offered under the statutes.

Providing recreational access to your lands can provide neighbors with unique opportunities without burdening you with too much risk.
Photo courtesy Steve Morreale

The limited liability statutes in each state are very similar about the duty of care landowners owe to recreationists. When they apply, the laws state that the landowners do not assume responsibility for injuries caused to recreationists, nor do they have the duty to keep the premises safe for use by others, nor must they give warning of hazardous conditions.

However, owners aren't protected from liability if they "willfully or maliciously" fail to guard or warn against a hazardous condition or use, or in other states, if they engage in "willful, wanton, or reckless conduct."

Some examples of cases where owners have been found liable despite the protection of limited liability statutes include maintaining on the property an unprotected open well, a hazardous fallen-in building, or a high structure with deteriorated walkways. Natural hazards such as steep slopes or lakes and streams generally don't put landowners at risk.

Recreational vehicle access is commonly included in most states limited liability laws.
Photo courtesy Arctic Cat.

Where owners were found liable, plaintiffs successfully showed that the owner:

- Knew about the condition.
- Failed to minimize the hazard.
- Knew people engaged in recreation activities in the area.
- Had the opportunity to warn people about the hazard, but failed to do so.

Note that even a trespasser could potentially win a lawsuit in any state in the Northeast involving this type of hazard. So you need to protect yourself against such hazards. Get rid of them if at all possible. If that isn't possible, put barricades around them and post "Keep Out" and warning signs.

SUITS ARE NOT LIKELY

Generally, limited liability statutes carry the same weight regardless of whether you have given permission to a recreationist or not, and regardless of whether your property is posted or not.

Limited liability statutes have held up very well in court cases, even on appeal to higher courts. In New York, for example, the basic limited liability statute was enacted in 1956. Since then, we have not found one case that was decided against a private landowner for activities covered under the statute, except for the type of obvious hazards (such as abandoned wells and old buildings) referred to earlier. A very small number had to be appealed to a higher court,

Claimants can bring suits regardless. But their legal council is unlikely to pursue a case when these statutes can be invoked in defense because the chance of a favorable decision is extremely small.

Many landowners are further protected by their liability insurance policies. Most include an "obligation to defend" clause stipulating that the insurance company will provide the insured with an attorney at no cost should the landowner be sued. If your policy does not include that clause, you may still win the case, but you will be responsible for your legal fees.

If you have livestock, be sure to check with your agent to make sure that you are covered should livestock injure recreationists.

PAY TO PLAY?

What if you charge people to use your property for recreation? A genuine gift given after the experience as a "thank you" (not required nor expected) for access typically does not invalidate limited liability statutes. But receipt of special consideration or compensation – money, goods, or services – in payment for access generally shifts more responsibility to the landowner. In such circumstances, landowners do have the responsibility to keep the property in a reasonably safe condition and must warn the user of any known dangerous conditions that could cause injury.

Keep in mind that even a verbal agreement is a legal and binding contract when both parties know of and expect that access to the land is contingent upon some form of "payment." So it is wise to prepare a written contract – with the aid of an attorney – that spells out the specifics of the agreement. A good contract that protects both parties against "surprises" is well worth the modest cost.

Obviously, you should also inform and work with your insurance company regarding any "pay-to-play" endeavors. Few homeowner insurance policies will cover suits brought against the landowner where recreationists are required to make payment for access. Usually for a small premium increase, you can add a rider in the policy that covers specific, occasional "for-fee" uses.

It is a good idea to have all recreationists using your property sign a "hold harmless" or "waiver of liability" form to release the landowner of liability for specific activities and specific types of injuries. For example, hunters should acknowledge that other hunters may be on the land while they are there, and recreation vehicle users should acknowledge that they know they may encounter fences and gates on your property. Such a document will not provide absolute protection, but it will strengthen your case should you end up in court. Note however that hold harmless releases are not valid for minors, even if their parents sign the waiver.

There is much you can do as a landowner to manage liability obligations to recreationists who use your land. (See summary sidebar: How to reduce recreational use risks.) Be aware of legal obligations and take reasonable precautions. If you use common sense and are smart about transferring most of the obligations (including insurance and legal fees) to the users, your obligations need not be worrisome, or costly.

Gary R. Goff is a Senior Extension Associate and Tommy L. Brown is a Senior Research Associate in the Department of Natural Resources, Cornell University.

Resource Spotlight
Reducing Recreation Liability Risk

Recreational Access and Owner Liability. Tommy Brown. Fact Sheet. DNR, Coop. Ext., Rm. 108, Fernow Hall, Cornell Univ., Ithaca, NY 14853. 4pgs. www.dnr.cornell.edu/ext/info/pubs/index.htm

Publications from Natural Resource, Agriculture, and Engineering Service (NRAES). See links below or request catalog from: NRAES, P.O. Box 4557, Ithaca, NY 14852-4557. Phone: (607) 255-7654.

Forest Landowner's Guide to Evaluating and Choosing a Natural Resource-based Enterprise. Jonathan Kays and Joy Drohan. NRAES-151. www.nraes.org/publications/nraes151.html

"Recreational Access to Private Lands: Liability Problems and Solutions." John Copeland. pgs. 237-250 In Natural Resources Income Opportunities for Private Lands Conference, Hagerstown, MD. 1998. NRAES-140. 275pgs. www.nraes.org/publications/nraes140.html

Table of State Liability Laws. www.imba.com/resources/trail_issues/liability_chart.html

Hunting Leases that Protect the Landowner and the Resource. Robert Malmsheimer and David Colligan. NY Forest Owner. July-Aug., 2001: pgs. 8-10.

New York Forest Owners Association, 1-800-836-3566 or online at www.nyfoa.org.

How to Reduce Recreational Use Risks

- Understand the basics of recreational-use liability statutes.
- Know who is likely to be on your land, when they will be there and what activities they will be pursuing.
- Identify what dangers exist.
- Eliminate known hazards.
- If you can't eliminate a hazard, barricade it and/or post warning signs.
- Inform users of the potential hazards.
- Check the provisions of your home- or farm-owner liability policy. Make sure your insurance agent knows about recreational activities on your property and be sure that the scope of activities and settlement coverage are adequate.
- If you are leasing recreational access to others, work with your lawyer to prepare contracts with clearly detailed provisions that adequately protect both your rights and the rights of the lessees.

How 'Plain People' Manage Risk

Old Order Amish and Mennonites Rely on Diversity and Community to Help Themselves and Others.

By Bill Henning

Editor's note: This article is part of a series focusing on risk management funded by the New York Crop Insurance Education Program under the Risk Management Agency (USDA) and the NYS Department of Agriculture & Markets.

When most of us think of risk management, some kind of insurance often comes to mind – or maybe safety training or diversifying our farm to reduce financial risks. Some folks might just figure it's safer to stay in bed in the morning.

"Plain people" – old order Mennonites and Amish – approach risk differently than most "English" farmers, as the plain people refer to the rest of us. Can we learn something by looking at how they cope with risk? With few exceptions, yes.

Many plain people grow up farming, some in more primitive fashion than others. They grow up exposed to risks of which we are completely unaware.

One example is farming with horses. Some of these faiths do not allow tractor farming or automobiles. Children raised in these plain families grow up with the risk of real horsepower, and learn to deal with it as second nature. For many English, working with horses would be an accident waiting to happen simply because technology has removed us far from a very natural experience.

There are many more examples too numerous to delve into here, from navigating high beams during a barn raising to working daily with ancient equipment built long before the advent of safety shields. Care and common sense keep these calculated risks from turning into disasters most of the time.

Common sense also rules when it comes to reducing production and marketing risks. Most plain farm families don't put all their economic eggs in one basket. Many rely on diverse rotations that include small grains and forage crops to feed livestock. They often have multiple enterprises and even small, farm-based businesses to make the most of their industrious labor through the seasons – not to mention a big garden that provides a harvest of healthful food for the family.

But the plain people have other means of living with risk that are firmly grounded in their religious beliefs. An important part of that belief system involves "taking care of their own." Plain people do not partake in government programs and avoid insurance. Much of their risk management involves treating neighbors the way they would like to be treated.

INSURANCE ALTERNATIVES

While the details vary from church to church, this alternative to insurance is common in plain communities. If a member of a community has a misfortune, perhaps a barn fire, the losses are made up for through a fund supported by free-will donations. Victims often handle smaller losses individually, while very large losses are handled by a fund supported by numerous communities. However, in every case, the local community plays an important role.

The question might now arise: What's the difference between this concept and insurance? There are five major differences: Losses are compensated for out of voluntary contributions. No one is paid for administration.Compensation is only for material things. The local community provides the labor, free of charge. There is never any profit involved. Emotional support is automatically included.

An example of that emotional support: In my area a man of a "horse and buggy" faith is currently in the hospital for an extended period of time. Members of the local community pay the transportation cost for his wife to travel – every day – to and from the hospital. People go with her to comfort both her and her husband – every day – while other community members look after the children at home – every day.

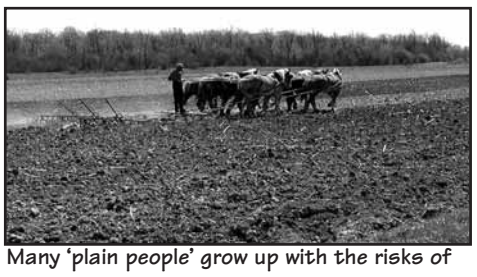
HEALTH CARE

The plain people deal with health care issues in much the same way as other natural catastrophes. When plain people become ill or are injured, getting the work done at home is not a problem. All the neighbors just pitch in and help until the disabled party is back on his or her feet.

The community also supports people with chronic or longer-term disabilities. For example, if an individual has a heart condition and can't work, the local community provides an ongoing stipend to support the family for as long as necessary.

Among all the plain communities, the rising cost of health care is a big concern. Plain people don't have health insurance, but pay cash when they need treatment. While some hospitals and other providers will negotiate discounts for prompt payment, others say they give no discounts at all.

Of course, it's pretty well known that – even after any discount – individuals pay significantly more than what insurance companies reimburse providers for the same services. In some circles, the question arises: "What is the value of all this medical technology when it becomes beyond the reach of common people?"



Many 'plain people' grow up with the risks of real horsepower and other hazards, and learn to deal with them as second nature. Photo by Bill Henning

THE LARGER COMMUNITY

Neighbors helping neighbors does not stop at the doors of any particular plain denomination. The Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) provides assistance across the country and around the world. Each year, volunteers (mostly Amish and Mennonite, but anybody is welcome) process tractor-trailer loads of meat in an MCC mobile canning factory that travels across the U.S. and into Canada. Donations pay for all expenses. The meat goes to feed folks in need resulting from catastrophes.

Mennonite Disaster Services (MDS) provides labor to assist with catastrophes where other help would not be available. This could be cleanup after fires, ice storms, tornados, etc.

Sometimes it involves rebuilding. Occasionally MDS offers other forms of assistance. For example, during the North Country ice storm in 1998, Finger Lakes area farmers loaned more than 90 generators through MDS. Many of these generators ended up serving two or three farms each, allowing thousands of cows to be milked until power was restored. Several local people went along to northern New York to assist with distribution. No one knew when or how these generators would return. But within four weeks all the generators were back. It all worked out well.

OLD AGE

The concept of "retirement," as we know it, does not exist in the Bible. Among the plain communities, three generations often live at the same address. While obtaining the critical mass of money to support retirement is a lifelong challenge for many "more modern" cultures, plain people are born with the concept that they will always care for others, and others will always care for them. In this manner, plain people are born with that critical mass, and never have to sweat about saving for old age.

Please note that Mennonites and Amish do not want any recognition for their deeds, whether taking care of each other or helping others outside their communities. Recognition is not their motivation, and they purposely avoid notice. They care for each other because it is the right thing to do, and they are called to it by their faith. Their good deeds are reported here simply to demonstrate other ways the plain community deals with risk.

'Horse and buggy' faiths face different kinds of risks, and often cope with them as a community. Photo by Bill Henning

Risk management, as exercised in the plain communities, does not answer every question. They recognized risk as part of life – a natural phenomenon. In the end, their means of living with risk really revolves around one word – love.

Bill Henning is a small farms specialist with Cornell Cooperative Extension's Northwest New York Dairy, Livestock, and Field Crops Team/ Pro-Dairy, a Small Farm Quarterly editorial team member, and a farmer.

What can we learn from the Amish and Mennonites about risk management?

We can learn that coping with risk on the community level is often as much about giving as it is about receiving:

Reduce production and marketing risks by diversifying your rotations, enterprises and businesses.

Prevent health problems by getting plenty of exercise, eating healthy food and avoiding vice.

Pitch in if a sick or injured neighbor needs short-term help. Contribute labor, transportation, childcare and emotional support even if you can't help financially.

Be generous and "invest" in your relationships with family, friends, neighbors and others in your community.

Volunteer to help with disaster relief – near and far.

STEWARDSHIP AND NATURE

Growing Clean Water On The Farm

DeLancey, NY, Dairy Farmer Tom Hutson is Honored with a Prestigious Environmental Stewardship Award

By Jennifer Morrill and Kirsten Ferguson

For the first time in ten years since the American Farmland Trust (AFT) established its annual Steward of the Land Award, a New York State farmer has been selected to receive the prestigious national honor.

AFT, an organization dedicated to protecting our nation's strategic agricultural resources, selected DeLancy dairy farmer Tom Hutson from over 75 outstanding finalists from all over the country for the award that recognizes the American farmer or farm family who best demonstrates leadership in protecting farmland and caring for the environment.

Hutson received a check for $10,000 at a ceremony on the steps of City Hall in Manhattan. The following day another presentation and picnic took place at a picturesque park on the river near his farm.

"Tom has always understood how his farm's stakeholders include not only the consumers of his products but the residents of New York City, whose clean drinking water depends on environmentally friendly agriculture," said Ralph Grossi, AFT president. "Tom both works the land and sustains it. His nomination really stood out as an example of what the future of farming could be."

"It's fitting that we recognize Tom, since it honors the memory of AFT founder Peggy McGrath Rockefeller. Peggy was avidly involved in the New York state dairy industry," Grossi added.

River Haven Farm is nestled in New York's Catskill Mountains where Hutson has 380 acres and a herd of 108 Holsteins. He raises corn, alfalfa hay and grass hay, along with oats and barley for grain, and straw for bedding. There are 57 acres of hardwood forest on the farm. He also raises Hi-HO's, a Holstein-Scottish Highland beef cattle cross.

PROTECTING THE NYC WATERSHED

Hutson was one of the first farmers to participate in pilot programs administered by the Watershed Agricultural Council (WAC), which manages waters quality protection programs in the New York City watershed. In order to reduce the risk of agricultural runoff reaching the Catskill/Delaware reservoir systems, Hutson installed filter strips and other technologies to filter runoff and prevent agricultural waste from entering the water supply during rainstorms. Filter strips are permanent rows of vegetation that slow water runoff and erosion of riverbanks, and filter out damaging substances from the water supply.

By permanently protecting his farm with a conservation easement acquired by the WAC, Hutson has made sure that he and future owners of River Haven Farm can continue farming the land while limiting economic pressure to redevelop and subdivide his property.

His land was made for farming, level and fertile with some of the best soil in the state. The conservation easement prevents non-agricultural development of this important natural asset. Wildlife benefit from the sustainable farm environment, too. Alongside one conserved field in a huge sycamore tree, bald eagles tend to a nest of three fledglings.

Nearly a hundred of Hutson's neighbors, fellow-board members and organizational representatives were on hand to witness his self-effacing and humorous nature in accepting the award. "I am humbled to receive this," he said, adding that the award belongs "to all of us."

In order to reduce the risk of agricultural runoff reaching the Catskill/Delaware reservoir systems, Hutson installed filter strips and other technologies to filter runoff and prevent agricultural waste from entering the water supply during rainstorms. Photo By Meredith Heuer

Sharing the conservation message

Hutson's gift for sharing his love of the land with the community makes him "the greatest one-man public-relations agency land conservation has ever seen," says WAC communications director Karen Rauter. Tom has shared his experiences with his peers and advocates through numerous on-farm demonstrations and speeches to countless visitors, media and groups. His one-on-one consultations with other farmers have resulted in numerous applications to the WAC conservation easement program.

Fred Huneke, chair of the WAC and fellow dairy farmer, added his praise for Hutson's efforts. "New York City faced a looming crisis in 1990—spending billions of dollars to build and operate a water filtration system. Instead, they came up with a novel plan to protect the water supply and keep it clean by partnering with farmers like Tom who work to manage their farms in environmentally positive ways. Tom has encouraged farmers in the watershed to join him in these efforts and that's meant the City has been spared a huge financial burden."

And Ira Stern, director of watershed lands and community planning for NY City's Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), couldn't agree more.

"Tom is a visionary and gutsy man who jumped into a project that had never been tried before. Tom is a man of courage, with a strong sense of what is right, and he is always a gentleman."

Stern and his colleagues realize that it hasn't always been popular for upstate farmers to cooperate with New York City, and added that because Hutson was the willing guinea-pig for almost every pilot project, he helped develop programs like the Whole Farm Planning process that's being undertaken voluntarily on over 90 percent of the watershed's farms.

LEADING BY EXAMPLE

"I wouldn't have signed up for the pilot program if we didn't have the local agencies and local people involved," Hutson says. "WAC is farmers dealing with farmers. That's the whole key to it: local involvement, local farmers on board. I don't believe the city ever believed we would get what we've got going now. I would hope that we could be a model. The lessons learned here should be able to be replicated in other watersheds."

Ralph Grossi echoes Hutson's sentiments. "Tom is a champion of good agriculture, leading and showing by example on his farm how you can provide consumers with food and environmental benefits, and attract wildlife at the same time."

The award was presented several weeks after AFT called for a new direction in U.S. farm policy— one that links support to land stewardship rather than to the production of specific commodities. In a report that detailed priorities for such a bill, AFT proposed rewarding farmers for protecting the environment and for providing public benefits such as wildlife habitat and clean water.

According to Grossi, "Green payments" would create greater incentives for farmers to deliver environmental benefits, and would reward stewards like Hutson. "Tom is a true steward of the land and a great inspiration to farmers across the country, the kind of farmer that the public needs to sustain."

Jennifer Morrill is the media relations manager and Kirsten Ferguson is a writer/editor for American Farmland Trust. They can be contacted at 202-378-1255, or at jmorrill@farmland.org and kferguson@farmland.org. American Farmland Trust is a national nonprofit organization working with communities and individuals to protect the best land, plan for agriculture and keep the land healthy. AFT's Northeast office is located in Saratoga Springs, New York. For more information, visit www.farmland.org.

River Haven Farm, nestled in New York's Catskill Mountains, includes 380 acres and a herd of 108 Holsteins. Photo By Meredith Heuer

STEWARDSHIP AND NATURE

Sustainable Energy Systems On the Farm

Three Sisters Farm in Sandy Lake, PA, Has Been Exploring Innovative, Energy-Conserving Technologies Since 1988. You Can Too.

By Darrell Frey

Energy conservation and the reduction of fossil fuel usage are important priorities in sustainable development. Innovative agricultural operations can help contribute to the search for alternatives to fossil fuels. More and more farms are implementing sustainable agriculture principles, where farming practices make efficient use of renewable (or replaceable) resources under the fundamental principle of not harming the environment or local ecology.

One example would be choosing crops to suit the climate, thus reducing the need for irrigation. Other solutions lie in conservation, selecting the appropriate tools and equipment for a job and working with the cycles of nature. Agricultural goods consumed locally also contribute to energy conservation by reducing the fuel used to ship farm products nation wide.

Until the 20th century many market gardens made use of hot beds to take advantage of heat from composting organic matter to promote plant growth. Three Sisters Farm has modernized this approach, with a compost chamber featuring a series of air ducts. Heat and carbon dioxide from the compost is blown to deep garden beds in the bioshelter, enhancing crop production in the winter months.

THREE SISTERS FARM AND BIOSHELTER

At Three Sisters Farm, clean energy and conservation are a priority of our farm's original design and ongoing development. Three Sisters Farm is a small-scale intensive market garden farm near Sandy Lake in Mercer County, PA. The bioshelter at Three Sisters Farm is a combination passive solar greenhouse, barn and composting facility. A major departure from traditional greenhouse design and operation, a bioshelter represents a synthesis of energy efficient architecture and ecological design.

The building is designed to capture and store solar energy, reducing the need for external energy input. Much of the growing space is deep soil beds, designed for mature crop production, rather than standard benches. Poultry and compost bins are located in contained areas, providing a variety of functions, such as gas exchange, heat production and heat storage, as well as producing food and compost. The bioshelter serves as the heart of the farm —allowing year round production of vegetables, herbs, flowers, various other useful plants, eggs, meat, as well as high quality compost.

ENERGY CONSERVATION

Energy conservation is the first step in reducing fossil fuel use. At Three Sisters Farm we have designed many conservation strategies into our bioshelter. Strategies to conserve energy include the use of windbreaks, earth berms and heavy insulation to reduce heat loss from the building. Similarly we have designed our building to have natural lighting, and passive cooling, via windows and vents, to reduce cooling costs in summer months.

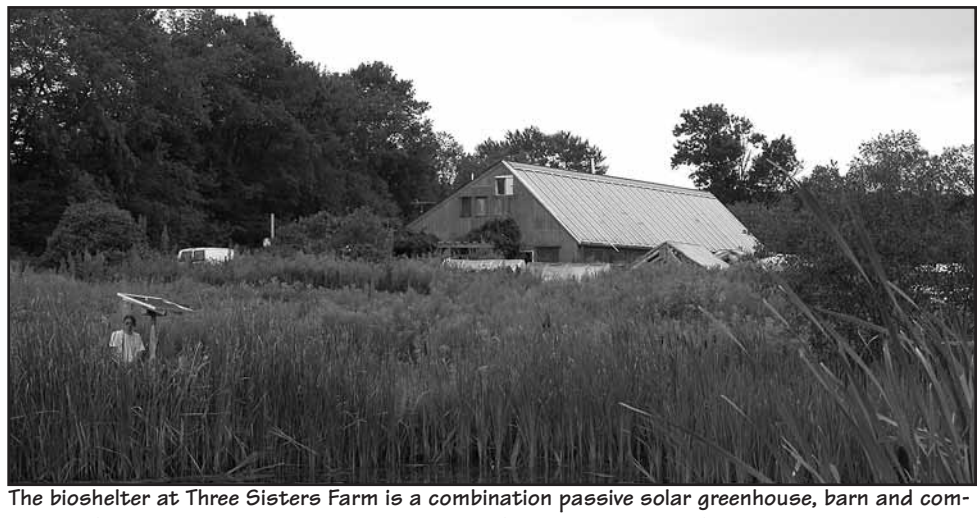
Our high tunnels -- unheated greenhouses that help extend the growing season -- are configured to reduce both heating and cooling costs, and our poly-tunnel greenhouses are designed to eliminate the need for cooling fans. These two high tunnels are fifteen feet wide and forty-five feet long, providing six hundred square feet of protected growing space.

By orienting these tunnels to prevailing winds, keeping them under fifty feet long and having wide doors on each end, they are cooled passively and do not require electric fans to ventilate. During the heating season, they are sealed on the ends and protected on the north side by a row of straw bales, reducing heat loss and extending the season by several weeks into the fall and spring.

FIREWOOD

Three cords of wood provide back up heat to the bioshelter each winter. Firewood is renewable in a lifetime and the carbon released has not been stored geologically for many million years. Rather it is considered "biogenic" or of biological origin. The forest area of Pennsylvania has increased in recent decades, as farmland is abandoned and reverts to woodlands. Additionally many foresters are advocating sustainable management practices. These considerations allow proper use of firewood to be considered a sustainable practice in Pennsylvania.

Poultry provide eggs and meat year-round, as well as manure for compost and thermal energy for winter crop production.



The bioshelter at Three Sisters Farm is a combination passive solar greenhouse, barn and composting facility, allowing year round production of vegetables, herbs, flowers, eggs, meat, as well as high quality compost. In the foreground is the solar pump.

SOLAR ELECTRICITY

Three Sisters Farm received a grant for installation of a photovoltaic irrigation system in the spring of 2004. The grant was sponsored by the Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture (PASA) and was funded by the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection's Energy Harvest Grant Program. Photovoltaic power generation offers a way to reduce demand on the electric power grid and therefore reduce air pollution and carbon dioxide production associated with electric generation.

Application of photovoltaic technology on the farm is best suited when sized for and applied to specific applications. Seasonal irrigation and livestock watering needs are two good examples of the application of solar power to a farm. Grid inter-tied photovoltaic systems are more expensive but allow a farm to contribute clean energy to the national grid during off peak hours and draw from the grid when needed.

BIOFUELS

The use of biodiesel fuel is a fast-growing trend, and biodiesel is especially suited for agricultural uses. Plant based oils can supplement and replace fossil fuel to power tractors, trucks and other diesel powered fuels.

Biogas production from agricultural waste is also a viable option being developed by dairy farms. These systems can be costly to construct, but properly designed and managed can provide clean renewable energy.

BIOTHERMAL ENERGY

Until the 20th century many market gardens made use of hot beds to use heat from composting organic matter to promote plant growth. We have modernized this system at Three Sisters Farm. Poultry manure and horse manure obtained from nearby stables is composted in the compost chambers. Compost chambers are closed systems, featuring a series of air ducts to provide ventilation to assist the decaying process. Heat and carbon dioxide from the compost is blown to deep garden beds in the bioshelter, enhancing crop production in the winter months.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Energy conservation makes good economic sense, in addition to being good for the planet. When we built our bioshelter in 1988, we estimated a similar sized greenhouse would require $3,000 per year to heat with over 4,000 gallons of fuel oil. Even at 2004 prices this would be nearly $8,000 per year. It is accurate to say that 75% of our $80,000 initial construction cost has been paid back in fifteen years, in fuel cost savings alone.

Darrell Frey is a permaculture design specialist at Three Sisters Permaculture Design in Sandy Lake, Pennsylvania. For more information about the Three Sisters Farm or about energy-related technologies and practices for your farm, contact Darrell at 724-376-2797 or defrey@bioshelter.com. For more information about the Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture (PASA) call 814-349-9856 or visit www.pasafarming.org.

MANAGING RISK

If You Can't See Them, They Can't See You

By JJ Schell

October is a busy time for farmers. The work of bringing in the fall crops to store for winter is well underway. The buzz of forage harvesters and combines can be heard across the region as picturesque cornfields fall victim to the voracious appetite of the cutter head.

Corn silage is the backbone of many dairy and beef rations, and numerous acres are harvested every fall. Safety is a concern during all phases of corn silage harvest, but safety on the highway stands out as a major concern. Many farmers have to travel long distances to harvest crops from widely separated fields.

Unfortunately, you can't control what other drivers do. But you can take steps to make yourself more visible and reduce the likelihood of an accident. Most producers make sure the equipment they operate is safe and road-ready, but sometimes, when time becomes a factor in harvesting the crop, safety is compromised.

It is important to make sure all lights, mirrors, brakes, and steering are adjusted properly and working correctly. . A tractor

Corn Silage is an important forage crop for dairy and beef rations, and with the proper precautions, can be safely harvested and stored.

used during the day that has no amber hazard lights or headlights will become an accident waiting to happen if the harvest pushes into the nighttime hours. Improperly adjusted or missing mirrors on tractors, with cabs, will create challenges when turning in and out of fields.

Before going to the field, make sure all safety devices are in operating condition. Find and fix any safety-related problems you may have noticed but did not take time to repair, such as a missing or broken shield, burned-out light bulb, or troublesome switch.

Make sure you have a Slow Moving Vehicle sign prominently displayed and properly fastened to the rear of equipment such as a gravity box or self-unloading wagon. Faded or dirty reflective strips and Slow Moving Vehicle symbols should be cleaned or replaced.

Pull-type forage harvesters, if not properly lighted, become a big safety risk at night due to their slow speed and width. Use reflective tape to outline the dimensions of the equipment so motorists can make out the size at night.

Another good practice is to use a flag person to help you get in and out of fields on a busy highway, or near blind spots on hills and curves. The flag person can also signal to motorists that there is a need to slow down.

It's this simple: If you make your field equipment more visible you are less likely to have a serious accident. Farming is dangerous. Take the time to maintain and operate machinery safely so you and your family can have a successful fall harvest season without personal injury or property damage.

For more information, the New York Center for Agriculture Medicine and Health is a great resource for information on how you can make your farm equipment more visible to motorists. You can contact NYCAMH toll-free at 800-743-7527.

JJ Schell is Agriculture Program Leader with Cornell Cooperative Extension of Schoharie County.

GRAZING

Bucking the Trends: Seasonal Dairy Start-up Adds Valuable Diversity to Dairy Industry

By Fay Benson

This spring residents of New York's Cortland County driving by the well known Space farm noticed some cows of a different color out in the pastures. The farm is easily recognized by the large "SPACE" shingled into the 140 foot long roof of the main barn.

The cows look different because they're crossbreds. But that's not the only difference on this farm; Bob and Nancy Space have rented the farm to Jim and Anne Philips who farm it as a seasonal dairy. The Philips only produce milk 9 to 10 months of the year. For the remaining 2-3 months of the year, people and cows take a break.

Seasonal dairying takes advantage of the low cost associated with grazing dairy cows, by making milk when there is grass growing. It is one of the techniques small dairies are using to remain profitable in the dairy industry. In Cortland County, as with the rest of the state, there has been an exodus of small dairies, those milking under a hundred or so cows. The trend has been towards larger farms where efficiency of scale can be captured.

For those farmers that want to manage smaller dairies, seasonal milking is just one of the solutions to remain profitable. Other solutions include managed grazing, farmstead cheese production, or transition to the organic dairy market.

EXTENSION -- A RESOURCE FOR NEW FARMERS

Jim and Anne contacted the Cortland County Extension office in 2004 looking for a farm in Central NY. They had a herd of cows in Ohio and were looking for a farm located near Cornell where Anne had agreed to work. Cornell Cooperative Extension has historically been a source of networking for those looking to buy or rent a farm and those that have a farm to rent or sell.

Besides helping the Philips locate farms to look at in the area, the South Central NY Dairy Team, which is centered in Cortland's Extension office, assisted them with developing a business plan. The team's Farm Business Specialist, Jacob Schuelke, helped work through the different types of arrangements that the Philips' were considering.

The Spaces, having retired from dairying a few years ago, were committed to keeping their land in farming even though the land around them is highly sought after for housing lots. The desires of the two families made for an easy match. I was asked to facilitate the discussion that resulted in the rental agreement between the two families.

SEASONAL DAIRYING

The Philips farm isn't the only seasonal dairy in the area. Just a mile up the road Mike Carroll and his father Earl have been seasonal dairy farmers for a number of years. They find the change in seasons enjoyable. Milking cows twice a day for 365 days a year can be wearing to some farmers and their families. The two to three month break during the winter provides a nice change of pace.

Both the Carrolls and the Philips are regular participants in educational meetings during the winter and long family vacations are possible too. In March and April when the baby calves are being born there are plenty of long nights and teaching a years' worth of calves to eat from the feeders in one month takes a lot of patience. But as Mike Carroll says, "Once it's over I don't have to do it again till next year."

Cows give the most milk shortly after they've had their calves. This means spring calving fits well with Central NY's climate, since the spring is when the most nutritious grass grows. This is the synergy that makes seasonal dairying profitable. When the animals need the highest nutrition, nature provides it in grass, which is a crop

Jim and Anne Philips moved from Ohio to New York to start a small, seasonal dairy farm with their three children. *Photo by Fay Benson*

that is relatively inexpensive to grow and needs no herbicides.

Since the cow is harvesting the grass herself and is spreading her manure back on the land, fuel costs are also low. When the cows are "dry" (8-10 weeks before they calve again) they don't require as high a level of nutrition. So the stored grass harvested in the summer goes a long way in keeping them in the winter.

DIVERSITY LEADS TO STRENGTH

Seasonal dairying isn't for everyone; it requires a different type of management, one that focuses more on cost control rather than on production. That is the benefit of having a diverse dairy industry in the Northeast; where a variety of farming styles exist to suit the diverse types of farmers looking to farm. This diversity encourages an influx of new dairy farmers, which is important to those who are already farming in a region.

Without new farmers taking the place of those that have transitioned out of the business, there wouldn't be the critical mass of farms which need the products and services that agri-business provides. Many regions of the state are experiencing longer drives for machinery parts, less choices for Veterinary services, and more difficulty in finding other support services.

WHAT'S NEXT?

The Philips are in the process of transitioning to certified organic dairy production as well. Their plan is to eventually have Anne stay at home and work on the farm with their three young children. In order to be successful they realize they will need to buck a few trends along the way.

Fay Benson is the Small Farm Educator with Cornell Cooperative Extension, Cortland County. This article is reprinted with permission from the Cortland Standard, June 1st 2006

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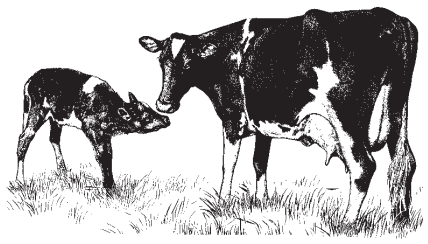
Youth Pages



Exploring the Small Farm Dream With 4-H Career Explorations

By Alicia Keller, Corfu, NY

On June 27-29, 2006 hundreds of 4-H youth attended the NYS 4-H Career Explorations trip on the campus of Cornell University. I represented Genesee County as a "focus assistant" for the session called "Exploring the Small Farm Dream."

Our group consisted of 14 youth representatives and 5 adult volunteers. Two group coordinators from Cornell's Small Farms Program arranged an educational experience in which we had the opportunity to explore the lives of small farmers. The first day we heard six speakers, and the second day consisted of visits to four local farming operations. The final day consisted of debriefing and reflection on our own agricultural dreams and ambitions.

This issue of the SFQ Youth Pages features the reflections of our group members on what we saw and what we learned.

Our 3-day session on "Exploring the Small Farm Dream" began in the classroom, where we heard from resource people like Christy Marshall of USDA Farm Services Agency, and from young people like ourselves who are already farming or thinking about farming.

Refining My Small Farm Dream

By Molly Edwards, Putnam Valley, NY

Ever since I can remember I have entertained the idea of having a small farm when I grow older. I haven't grown up on a farm, though I was in a 4-H club for a time that was based at a farm. I recently joined a small organic farm/ food co-op where we plant, take care of, and harvest a multitude of varieties of vegetables, from the 50 different kinds of lettuce to Asian greens to corn and pumpkins.

I also learned that there were a lot of directions you could go if you choose to run a farm. We visited ZiemBarbWay Farm that is actually a boarding house for cows and specializes in embryo transfers. We toured Hillcrest Dairy, a family-owned processing plant which takes the milk from their cows and sells it or turns it into cheese. Yet another farmer chose to open a restaurant that uses the organic fruits and vegetables that he grows.

Lou Lego explains apple pest management strategies at Elderberry Pond Farm.

However, this small farm is extremely different from the farms that our group visited during Career Explorations. My small experience in farming didn't prepare me for what I saw and learned during my stay at Cornell. I knew farming was a tremendously difficult way of life, but I had no idea just how hard it actually was. One farmer we met said that he still had a couple of years to go until he broke even.

I have decided that, after touring the farms and talking to people in my group that live on farms, I will still have a small farm when I grow older, but it will most likely be smaller than what I would like and would probably be a hobby farm, not a full working farm. By taking part in Career Explorations this year, I have definitely gained a whole new level of respect for people who run any farm small or large. I had no idea what a farmer's life was really like, and this program has given me a good view of that life and helped me decide about my future.

Hillcrest Dairy showed us the whole plant where they make cheese and bottle their own milk.

Chris and Kim Grant of Indian Chimney Farm explained the challenges and rewards of running a small agritourism operation.

Traveling Through the Minds of Small Farms

By Samantha VanAlstine, Springfield, NY

For the past few days, I have spent time at Cornell University with students from many counties in a program on Exploring the Small Farm Dream. All of these presenters had very interesting, surprising and strange information to say and I think that anyway it was said; we all learned something different from it.

Several of the farmers told us that if you want to succeed and you try hard, and you love what you do, you can do it. We learned that there are many different ways you can succeed on a farm, such as Elderberry Pond Farm which has their own restaurant and grows their own fruits and vegetables.

In this program, I have learned many new ways to succeed in farming. There are many people out there that will help you if you just ask for it.

My Own Small Farm Dream

By Elizabeth Trombly, Chateaugay, NY

My father owns a cash crop farm and we have a small barn for our animals. We started out with just two horses, and now we have seven heifers and one cow. I won the cow through the NYS Guernsey calf scholarship program, in May she had a set of twin girls.

While here at Cornell I was able to discover some new aspects of small farming. One of farms we visited was ZiemBarbWay farm of Aurora, NY. Here the owners board and raise dairy cattle for other people. The special part of the farm is that every cow is worth $20,000 or more. Along with boarding, they also do embryo transfers on most of the animals. Both the husband and wife graduated from Cornell University. The husband has a degree dealing with dairy genetics; this was something new that has sparked an interest in possible degree choices for me.

Some day after college I myself plan on having a small farm (less than 50 head of cattle), along with a second job. My experience over this time has allowed me to see and hear the point of views from many farmers. Though they all say that it's very hard work, they all agree that they couldn't see themselves doing anything else and that they have a great passion for their lifestyle. This program has only encouraged me and has given me new connections to fulfill my own small farm dream.

Getting a Reality Check on Farming

By Elizabeth Ochieng, Poughkeepsie, NY

Before coming to Cornell for Career Exploration, I was interested in having a small farm of my own in the future because some of the farmers where I come from made it seem very easy.

Well, whoever said that farming is easy is wrong. After traveling to Indian Chimney Farm, Hillcrest Dairy, ZiemBarbWay Farm and Elderberry Pond Farm and Restaurant, I found out that owning a farm is not such an easy job. You have to put a lot of things at risk, you have to be brave and dedicated, and you also have to love what you are doing. Farmers have to make a lot of sacrifices that I think many people would never do.

What I learned is that if you want to be a farmer, you need to have a plan, you need to be prepared for any disaster, and also… don't expect success every single time.

ZiemBarbWay Farm

Elderberry Pond Farm

Hillcrest Dairy

Hard Work, Rewarding Lifestyle

By Kathryn Davis

I recently attended Cornell Career Explorations, in the group called Exploring the Small Farm Dream. We visited four small farms and the common theme I got from all of them is that it is a lot of hard work -- but it is a very rewarding lifestyle. I also learned that to be profitable small farms have to find ways to be different so they stand out and don't get overlooked or overshadowed by large farms.

I don't currently live on a farm but I plan to one day. I want to have free range chickens, dairy goats, and hair sheep. The chickens I will use for eggs and meat, I will milk the goats and make cheese and soap, and I will raise the sheep for meat. I also want to grow fruits and vegetables. I want to be self-sufficient and sell the extra products I have to people who like fresh farm products. This is my idealistic dream. I know that things may not end up this way but I am going to try.

A Passion for Farming

By Anna Plattner and Ashley Schoenborn, Greene County, NY

We never realized exactly how much work was involved with farming until we attended Career Explorations 2006. The farmers that we visited all had to farm along with a second job just to make ends meet. We learned that to be a farmer you have to have a passion for what you do. Without a passion there is no way you can wake up with the sun just to feed your animals and milk your cows.

We learned that farming isn't just a job, it's a whole way of life that few have the patience and perseverance for. Career Explorations 2006 was a truly inspiring trip that gave us a whole new perspective on farming and its many aspects. No one should ever say farming is trivial because it's just about the hardest, most challenging, passionate career out there, and we respect anybody who is brave enough do it.

Activity

WORD SEARCH: Pursuing the Small Farm Dream

By Craig Lesser and Kyle Dente

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ALPACA
CHEESE MAKING
CONVENTIONAL
CORNELL
DAIRY
DRYCOWS
ECONOMIES OF SCALE
ELDERBERRY POND
EMBRYO TRANSFERS
FRESH COWS
HEIFER
HILLCREST DAIRY
INDIAN CHIMNEY
MILK PROCESSING
ORGANIC
PASTEURIZATION
RAWMILK
SUBSISTANCE FARMING
ZIEMBARBWAY

SOLUTION ON PAGE 18

Want to write for the Youth Pages? Writers need not be 4-H members. Please submit your article or letter to:
Celeste Carmichael, 4-H Youth Development Program Specialist, CCE State 4-H Youth Development Office,
340 Roberts Hall, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14853
Phone 607-255-4799, Fax 607-255-0788, http://cce.cornell.edu/4h

Resource Spotlight

The Beginning Small Farmer's Guide to Success

By: Justin Fish, Schenectady County, NY

NY FarmLink
http://nyfarmlink.org/about.htm
Check out this organization that helps support those in pursuit of the small farm dream by connecting them with other beginning farmers and people who want to experience the farm lifestyle.

NY FarmNet
www.nyfarmnet.org
This organization helps support farmers during challenging times like farm transitions.

FSA Rural Youth Loans
www.fsa.usda.gov/DAFL/youthloans.htm
Young people can check out this website to find out ways to gain financial support to help make their farming dreams come true.

NY Farm Bureau
www.nyfb.org/programs/YF&R/yngfarm.htm
The New York State Farm Bureau organizes leadership events, activities, and provides achievement awards for young farmers and ranchers.

You Gotta Love It!

By Lauren Pitman and Kyle Donnan

After visiting several small farms and listening to people for the "Exploring the Small Farm Dream" Career Exploration group at Cornell University, we got many new insights on the small farming perspective. The biggest message was that you absolutely have to love what you do.

It would appear as though you can't make a whole lot of money, extra money anyway, by working on a small farm, but you sure do spend a lot. Whether you raise alpacas, goats, cows, or veggies, you absolutely have to have a business plan – you have to know what you want to do and how you are going to go about doing it.

The owners of all four farms we visited work at outside jobs to help support the family. They also have businesses branching off from the farm to bring in some extra money by selling its products, such as honey, produce, or wool. They work day in and day out to keep things running smoothly. Basically, there isn't a whole lot of time for relaxation. But the people we met truly do love what they do and are happy with their lives.

Living on small farms ourselves, we could relate to a lot of what we heard. After this trip, Kyle and I realized that we definitely do not want to live on a large farm of any sort, but another small hobby farm would suit us just fine. Kyle would like a larger farm of crops and beef, but Lauren, would be happy with a couple beef cows, a milking cow, some horses, oxen, and other various animals to play around with and have it still feel like I can be living some of my small farm dream as well.

This Career Exploration group was a good help in educating us about how small farms are run and how they fit in our society. We enjoyed the program very much and would recommend it to anyone who would like to further explore their small farm dream.

Do You Care About Farming?
New online youth magazine wants to hear from you!

What does soul music, wireless technology, and provocative advertising have to do with changing the food system? Find out in REAP/SOW (www.reapsow.org), a new youth-driven, online magazine for the sustainable food movement!

Right now, you can also read about:
Ten young leaders who are changing the food system
A theater troupe that promotes local food
A review of "Grub: Ideas for an Urban Organic Kitchen"
And more at www.reapsow.org !

REAP/SOW is a creative space for youthful thinkers and doers working to build a healthier, more sustainable food system. We want young people to contribute their own art, songs, recipes, farm techniques, thoughts, writing, etc. to www.reapsow.org.

COWS AND CROPS

From Vegetable CSA to Small Dairy Creamery

Wake Robin Farm Makes a Challenging Transition

By Jean Burr

I met Meg and Bruce Schader, owners of Wake Robin Farm, in April of 2006 when a team from Onondaga County Soil and Water Conservation District went out to their farm to look around and make some recommendations. As the Grazing Specialist, I was primarily looking at their pasture, the number of cows, and if they planned to get bigger. I came to realize that this was a farm in the midst of a very interesting transition.

THE BEST LAID PLANS….

For six years, Wake Robin Farm was a successful CSA on the outskirts of Jordan, New York. A couple of years ago, the Schaders started planning to milk cows. In November of 2005, they built a building they call the Creamery as the first step in their transition from a vegetable CSA to dairy production. In the spring of 2006, they bought 4 pregnant jersey heifers, and planned to start processing milk, making cheeses and yogurt as the cows calved.

It hasn't quite worked out that way.

Meg and Bruce had originally planned to not plant any vegetables this year, but did plant vegetables when plans for the creamery weren't coming together in a timely manner. They also switched from a CSA to retailing their vegetables from the sale floor in the creamery and at the Regional Market

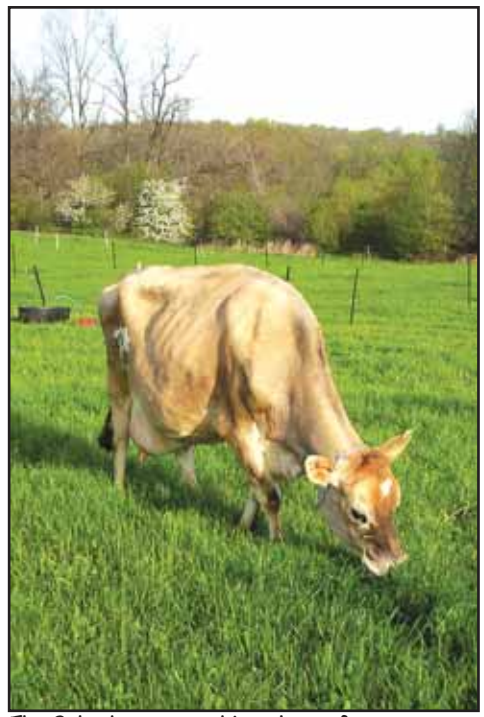
Meg and Bruce Schader ran a vegetable CSA farm for six years before starting their dairy herd with four pregnant Jersey heifers.

in Syracuse. Almost an acre of pick your own flowers are also available. These are their only sources of income until the creamery is productive.

Why would a successful CSA transition to dairy? Schaders see more income in "cream on top" milk, yogurt, and eventually, cheese. They plan to sell locally to the network they have in place from the CSA, and as they get bigger, to wholesale products, mostly cheeses. Bruce adds, "These soils don't grow vegetables well." He says that was the first mistake, growing vegetables in ground better suited to growing grass.

20-20 HINDSIGHT

The move from vegetables to cows seemed logical, Meg says, since Bruce grew up on a dairy farm. But this transition period has been hard, with equipment installation and start up not going well. The pasteurizer had to be sent back to the manufacturer twice for repairs. That set the timetable back significantly.



The Schaders tapped into lots of resources for advice and technical assistance to start their new grazing and creamery enterprises.

The second mistake, Meg thinks, was to make their own hay. They rented 18 acres of hay ground, and found it was more time intensive than they thought it would be. Buying hay would have been a better option.

The 4 cows have all calved now, and have grazed the summer on just 1.5 highly productive acres, moving to a new paddock after each milking. This was a good year to begin grazing. The cows started grazing early, and with enough rain this summer, they got all their summer forage from the pasture. They also get some grain in the barn at milking.

LOOKING AHEAD

Bruce seeded down 6 more acres to graze this fall and next year when cow numbers are planned to increase. The maximum number of cows will be 10-12, all Jerseys.

Wake Robin Farm is not yet certified as organic. As a CSA, they communicated with all of their customers, and everyone knew that the crops were grown naturally. Certification wasn't something they needed to sell their product.

Getting certified may be something they will do when they are able to wholesale, and are selling to people who don't know them and the farm. But, Meg says, the cows aren't yet certifiable, and the land they took hay from is not, as it was conventionally farmed just last year, so that isn't yet an option.

Meg recommends that anyone starting a small creamery get in touch with their local inspector before they even think about building, and establish a good working relationship. The inspector from NYS Department of Agriculture & Markets, Bob Harrington, has been an excellent source of information and advice.

The Schaders are very grateful for the advice and technical assistance they've gotten from a number other resources as well. These include Graze NY, Onondaga County Soil and Water Conservation District, Karen Sullivan of Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative, NY FarmNet. Fellow farmers Dave and Sue Evans of Evans Farmhouse Creamery in Norwich, and Carmella Hoffman of Sunset View Creamery in Odessa have been valued mentors as well.

Preserving farm land is very important to the Schaders. They like producing safe, natural food that is high in quality. They value the tradition of farming, and helping people become connected to the food they eat and the land it is grown on. Most importantly, they appreciate living the life they want to live; being home with their son, having their own schedule, and working out of doors doing what they love.

Jean Burr is the Grazing Specialist with Onondaga County Soil and Water Conservation District.

NEW FARMERS

When The Time Comes…

Transferring Applecheek Farm

By Martha Herbert Izzi

Dairy farmer John Clark has big plans for January 1, 2008. "I'm going to sleep the whole day."

That may be a modest dream to some, but it will be the first New Years day in his memory that he hasn't gotten up to milk the cows. And it is a date that he and his wife, Judy, have been working long and hard to achieve as the senior Clarks transfer the management of their 327 acre organic farm in Hyde Park, Vermont to their two sons, John and Jason and their families.

What sets this transfer apart from others is that most farms today are not going to younger members of the family who have vastly different business plans for the farm.

The Clark family has been milking 65 registered Holsteins since 1965. Now they are ready to move on to a new chapter, a slower pace, perhaps try out some new skills. Their story began years ago when they were struggling to pay the bills and keep from going under. They were determined to mine every possible avenue of assistance to survive. They quickly learned the value of reaching out, building a network and being open to new approaches to farming.

Judy and John Clark are looking forward to more R&R in 2008 after the transfer of Applecheek Farm is completed.

BUILDING THE DREAM TEAM

"We found the resources right under our noses," says Judy. They began sharing ideas with what came to be known as "the dream team" -- neighbors, friends, family, exchange students, Judy's work colleagues. The team grew to thirty people who wanted to help sustain all farms, most critically the Clark's.

"They were dedicated and they met over a period of ten years and we miss them," says Judy. "One was Peter who did economics and marketing. Others, for example, were teachers who organized field trips, and showed us how to employ proper safety standards"

They also sought out the help of professionals, like Willie Gibson of the University of Vermont who took them through a course in holistic management, based on the premise that each of the farm enterprises "must be profitable to be sustainable and if they aren't get rid of them."

"He was tremendously helpful," Judy explains. "He made us look at the whole, our quality of life, our energy, and our products. And the sustainable part was, did we have an equal energy exchange?" Or was it too much in and too little out? From that experience they diversified the farm and opened their doors to agritourism and went to a certified organic dairy about six years ago.

At the same time the Clarks began to think about their eventual retirement and the farm's future. Oldest son John, Jr. had goals for a different career and maybe a "hobby farm with no more than five acres," he smiles. But his roots caught up with him and he found himself looking at the possibilities. He and his wife, Rocio, who had come to Applecheek as an intern from Costa Rica, were attracted to a "more efficient, simplistic system."

The Clark family has settled on a transfer plan that includes turning over the management of the farm to the younger members while the senior Clarks retain the real estate at the outset. They are looking at the Limited Liability Corporation (LLC) model.

DOING THEIR HOMEWORK

And they have done their homework. For example, John, Jr. found that he can get nineteen pounds of cheese out of 100 pounds of milk from a Devon, a sixteenth century grass-efficient English breed, versus ten pounds of cheese from a Holstein. So they "are going through the kinks" of crossing Holsteins with New Zealand Freisians and experimenting with Devons at the same time. They are well on their way to operating a diversified, grass based, low tillage dairy, including pastured poultry and a cheese making business.

The existing barns are being refitted to include a New Zealand Swing System for milking, as well as new viewing and sales rooms for the organic beef, veal, chicken, eggs and cheese products they will offer. Judy says, "It's hard to keep up with the changes," as she looks out at new the 26x30 chicken tractor. And John Jr. eagerly chimes in saying, "Pastured poultry eggs have a 1-1 ratio of omega-3 and omega-6 compared to conventionally raised hens, plus higher beta carotene. We are experimenting with moving broilers on pasture, too."

Then there is Jason, the younger, newly married Clark son who is a graduate of Johnson and Wales and a passionate chef and caterer. "I planned to own a restaurant until I got the idea of catering on farm." To that end, his parents loaned the money for a heated building with a commercial kitchen large enough to house conferences, workshops, family reunions, a few weddings and children's birthday parties. All of which have been happening over the past five years.

With the help of some creative thinking from a diversified "Dream Team," older son John Clark and his wife Rocio are well on the way to operating a diversified, grass based, low tillage dairy, including pastured poultry and a cheese making business.

Farm Transfer Trends in Vermont

According to Deb Heleba, Coordinator of Land Link Vermont, farm transfers "are more a process than a one time deal." Often the complications of family dynamics, communications especially, make it difficult for producers to decide how the farm will be transferred. Eighty-eight percent of farms in Vermont are sole proprietorships. So workshops are the common entry point where people begin to think about what they are going to do. Heleba says that "the Clarks are ahead of many families because at least they try to communicate."

"How to equitably divide the farm when one son or daughter lives and works on-farm, and another lives on the west coast, for example, is a major problem," says Bob Parsons, UVM extension specialist who teaches farm transfer workshops around the Northeast. He opens his programs with a business management focus and asks, "How do you want to retire?" From there he gets into to estate planning, management, ownership, and income.

A popular vehicle for transferring farms is the Limited Liability Corporation as the Clarks are using, which allows seniors to transfer pieces of the business over time; labor, management, business, and real estate.

Land values in Vermont soared after 9/11. And that has made it very difficult for new people to get into farming. Then too, there is "the changing face of agriculture in Vermont," according to both Heleba and Parsons. "We're seeing an increased demand for small scale diversified farms principally vegetable production. So how to match the demand for about twenty acres to grow vegetables with the average dairy farmer who has 200 acres to sell is a major headache for the people at LandLink.

"People want to farm" says Heleba. "We just did a workshop where forty prospective farmers attended, mostly wanting to get into vegetable production." While "there has been a huge growth in organic," she says, people are not getting into livestock."

Younger son Jason Clark says "I planned to own a restaurant until I got the idea of catering on farm." The farm now boasts a commercial kitchen and a space large enough to house conferences, workshops, family reunions, weddings and birthday parties.

As a member of the Vermont Tourism Network, Jason is looking at the motor coach market as a means of expanding the business. He also caters off-farm, and that constitutes about twenty percent of his operation. The extensive herb and vegetable gardens outside the catering facility underscores Jason's interest in fresh, organic produce, and assure visitors who want to know where their food comes from that theirs is grown just outside their dining room window and will be fresh and delicious!

COMMUNICATION'S THE KEY

On a personal level, the family has faced the biggest challenge and that is communication amongst themselves. Everyone agrees that "communication is the most important!" When it became apparent that the sons were going to take over the farm, the Clarks began to schedule weekly family meetings "on how to run the business," which are easier to maintain in winters than summers.

According to Judy, "The family meetings have been a vital tool for us to respect, listen, and effectively express ideas and opinions and deal with perceptions." Even so, new issues crop up all the time and there are tensions to be addressed. "So we have met with a mediator, twice so far, and it has been effective."

Once again they are reaching out and finding the help they need to effect the actual transfer. "We're looking for a format that will work for six members of the family plus three children," according to Judy. And they have found financial aid in the form of grants from various sources to help them develop business plans for each of the Applecheek enterprises.

The family is working with UVM extension, the Vermont Department of Agriculture and Intervale consultants. They received a $10,000 grant from Vermont Housing and Conservation Board for business consultants, another $5K grant from the VHCB, a $2500 grant recently towards the poultry business, and a NOFA mentoring grant to Rocio for her to attend cheesemaking education seminars along with the mentoring assistance.

The family has settled on a plan that includes turning over the management of the farm to the younger members while the senior Clarks retain the real estate at the outset. They are looking at the Limited Liability Corporation (LLC) model. With the LLC "money will go into the pot and everyone will take an income."

The visitor comes away with a sense of optimism, that these five people are dedicated to moving forward and making this work, despite the financial uncertainties, despite the obstacles. Besides, John Sr. has promised himself a long winter's nap.

For more information e-mail: applecheek@pshift.com, or www.applecheekfarm.com.

Resource Spotlight

Land Link Vermont: Keeping Land in Farming

Many people want to farm in Vermont, but finding a place to do it can be challenging. Land Link Vermont, coordinated by Deb Heleba, addresses the obstacles farmers face in securing and transferring land. The program manages a matching service that connects new-entry and transitioning farmers with retiring farmers and non-farming landowners. Land Link also offers workshops, publications, and consultations that provide information about farmland tenure options, inter-generational transfer of farms, and farm management. For more information contact Debra Heleba at 802-656-5459 or debra.heleba@uvm.edu.

HOME & FAMILY

On Raising Rural Kids

The Importance of Strong Families

By Celeste Carmichael

Raising kids is about much more than getting everyone to where they need to be on time, car pooling, exact discipline methods, and chore charts...isn't it?

Last winter I attended a conference in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina on Strengthening Families. It was organized by the Clemson University Cooperative Extension Youth and Families Program. Looking back, I probably attended the conference for all the wrong reasons (did I mention that the conference was in Myrtle Beach?). Well, that is okay – because I came back with a lot of information and am still talking about what I learned.

"Begin with the end in mind", advised Toni Pipkins, former state 4-H Youth Development Leader from South Carolina and capnote speaker at the conference. "The way that we raise strong families is to think first about what we want our children to be like as adults. For most of us, what we are after in the "end" is caring, competent, contributing adults." Although how we get there might include a few car pools and chore charts…there really is much more to consider.

WHY TALK ABOUT STRONG FAMILIES?
These are stressful times for families. Strains on time, money and emotions can mean that home becomes the place where everyone is worn out or angry. Dysfunctional family relationships are often at the root of problems such as early teen sexuality, youth suicide, teen pregnancy, runaways, substance abuse, childhood and adolescent depression, child abuse and neglect, and family violence.

SO… WHAT MAKES FAMILIES STRONG?
Researchers have worked hard to answer this question and agree that strong, healthy families have some important traits in common (see sidebar.) These traits are found in families across the board – different races, social backgrounds, nationalities, and religious beliefs.

One way to build family commitment is to practice family traditions, which may be as simple as reading stories before bedtime,

When a family is pretty balanced in all of these areas, it is more likely to bounce back from the normal kicks and bruises that life gives. The good news is that intentionally building in time to build up healthy family traits can help us keep it all together.

Celeste Carmichael is Program Specialist with the NYS 4-H Youth Development Office.

Simply spending time together is one of the key traits of strong families..

Key Traits of Strong Families

Being caring and be appreciative
Even when a family member makes many mistakes, members of strong families find ways to encourage and support each person. Strong families notice positive behaviors, talents, skills and achievements and compliment each other.

Spending time together
When 1,500 school-age children were asked, "What do you think makes a happy family?" the children didn't list money, cars, big homes or televisions. The answer they gave most was "doing things together." Children want parents to be available, to have time, to show interest in their activities, to do things with them and to talk with them. Eating meals together, working together, making treats together, and watching movies or playing games are examples of shared activities.

Receiving and giving encouragement
Members of strong families feel they really belong in their family. Family members feel accepted for what they are and promote one another's self-esteem. They celebrate each other's successes and help each other learn from mistakes.

Showing commitment
Members of strong families are committed to the family. They value the things that make their family special. One way to build family commitment is to practice family traditions. The tradition may be as simple as stories before bedtime, or as elaborate as an annual big vacation. One of my kids' favorite traditions is "donut day". Donut Day is officially scheduled at our house on Saturdays when my husband and two year old son go for an early morning haircut.

Practicing good communication skills
Strong families communicate. They talk. They share themselves. They share their feelings, hopes, dreams, fears, joys, sorrows, experiences, growth, mistakes and needs. They also take the time to listen and respond to what others have to say.

Coping with change
All families develop habits, routines, and a set of rules. These patterns are ways to deal with day-to-day life. As changes happen in families, often routines are disrupted – increasing stress for the family. There are a number of common changes most families face. Children get older. Adults switch jobs or retire. Families are reshaped by birth, adoption, marriage, divorce, sickness, and death. Families move to different communities, etc. Being flexible, a good communicator and extra loving during changes helps family members to ease through change.

Being spiritual
Research confirms that those who find peace in their faith live longer, happier, more connected lives. Members of strong families share a belief in something greater than themselves. They agree about what is right and wrong and what is really important to them. Shared values and beliefs provide these families with purpose and meaning, and helps provide unity to their goals. They look to these values and beliefs for guidelines to live by. In strong families, spirituality is a powerful and important source of strength.

Nurturing community and family ties
Although busy schedules can make it hard to spend time with people outside the family, ties with relatives, neighbors, and friends are especially important.
Strong families draw on other people and institutions for support. If they have a hard time dealing with a problem, they are willing to seek outside help. Strong families also tend to be closely involved with the schools, churches, and local organizations that promote the well-being of the community and the individual.

Having a clear role.
Members of strong families have a clear idea about their day-to-day roles and obligations to the family. Strong families also make decisions, solve family problems and do family work together. Everyone participates. Parents are the leaders, but the children's opinions and efforts are encouraged and appreciated.

HOME & FAMILY

Advice For Building a Strong Family

Interview with Reverend Nancy Rehkughler

By Celeste Carmichael

Reverend Nancy Rehkughler is Senior Pastor of the Fayetteville United Methodist Church and Elder of the North Central New York Conference. She has counseled many families over the years and has the added experience of being the mom of four.

Q. Given all of the stresses that families experience these days, what advice do you have for families?

A. I should first say that from where I sit I have learned that there is no such thing as a "perfect" family. But a healthy family – one that is respectful and loving to one another, kind and generous…that is something to work towards.

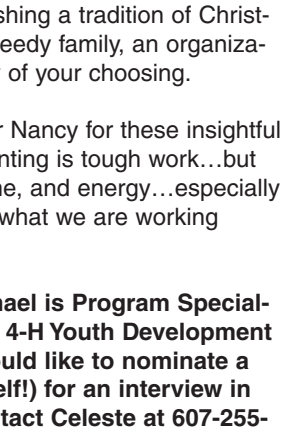
I would say that the first on my list of advice would be to be intentional - know and live your values. Work together as a family to figure out what is most important to all of you. Take time to talk and figure out - what are your values? Make a family project of it. As a family grows and matures daily choices should be consistent with family values. Ask yourselves regularly – "are the things that we are doing consistent with our values?"

I would say to strive for balance. There are so many choices today. Families should be aware of and do activities that fulfill their mind, body and spirit. People don't acknowledge their need to be spiritual in this day and age. Being spiritual includes service to others, being a part of a faith community etc. What spiritual is to one family may very well be different in another family depending on cultural values. Balance also includes being attentive to your physical well being. We need to be good stewards of our bodies as well.

And I would say it helps to love learning, and always be willing to learn and grow. When parents model this, kids more often find learning enjoyable.

Q. What observations have you made about families today?

A. People have a tendency to over-schedule their lives so that there is no time to just "be" together. Being in constant motion is also not conducive to the spiritual life,



Reverend Nancy Rehkughler

which requires some contemplative time. It is tough to go against the grain of hyper-activity, since this is what everyone is doing, but sometimes the best thing is just to say "no" to activities. Do the things that you love…but don't try to do everything. Focus on the things that you are really passionate about. Become excellent at a few things. Spend some Sabbath time each week.

I would also observe that today's families seem to have a difficult time resisting the temptation of materialism. Parents give their children everything. This makes it more difficult to "be spiritual" because too many possessions actually numb the spirit.

Q. If you could suggest two approaches to becoming a healthier family, what would they be?

A. Family dinners! I think that family dinners should be a priority. From having a time to be thankful and grateful together to sharing the highs and the lows of everyone's day it is a great way to spend time together.

I would also recommend participating in community service together. Working together on a service project brings the family together around something that is above their own self-interest. This might simply be establishing a tradition of Christmas giving to a needy family, an organization, or a ministry of your choosing.

Thank you Pastor Nancy for these insightful comments! Parenting is tough work…but well worth the time, and energy…especially if we think about what we are working towards.

Celeste Carmichael is Program Specialist with the NYS 4-H Youth Development Office. If you would like to nominate a friend (or yourself!) for an interview in this column contact Celeste at 607-255-4799 or cjc17@cornell.edu. Any topic related to rural youth will be considered.

Resource Spotlight
Strengthening Families

Want to know more about studies related to strengthening families or rural youth? Here are a few of websites to get you started:

Building Strong Families (University of Missouri website)
http://extension.missouri.edu/bsf/index.htm

Building Family Strengths (Auburn University website)
http://www.humsci.auburn.edu/parent/strength/

Issues Facing Rural Youth: A Compendium of Research, Reports, and Public Opinion Polls. http://www.national4-hheadquarters.gov/library/ruralresearch.pdf

COWS AND CROPS

A New Way to Make Hay?

Wide swath mowing is the focus of Northern NY Agricultural Development Program research

By some estimates, as much as 25 percent of a hay crop can be lost to inclement weather. So, speeding up the process for making haylage – finely cut hay stored in silos or feedbunks - while improving the quality of the cut forage equals time saved, a better dairy feed, and increased milk production.

With funding from the Northern New York Agricultural Development Program, farmers, Cornell University researchers and Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) educators have begun evaluating wide-swath mowing and hay conditioning as a speedier way for North Country farmers to cut, harvest and store haylage all in one day.

Wide swath mowing spreads cut forage to 90 percent or more of the cut width, creating up to three times more sun exposure over traditionally-harvested narrow windrows. Conditioning forces the moisture out of cut stems and leaves and may speed drying time by as much as 30 percent in some areas.

Project leader Cornell Crop and Soil Science Professor and NYS Forage Specialist Jerry Cherney says, "While conditioning clearly helps make baled dry hay, it is not clear that conditioning, with either rollers or finger-type conditioners, provides significant help during the drying down process to harvest haylage. Conditioning requires increased power output with added fuel costs, so if that step can be eliminated, farmers save."

Cornell Animal Science Associate Professor Debbie Cherney says same-day wide swath harvesting allows the hay to continue to photosynthesize after cutting and avoids overnight loss of sugars in the forage. A higher sugar content makes a higher quality forage and higher milk production.

Wide swathing offers a gain of 300 lbs. worth of potential milk production in every ton of dry matter fed as silage and a nine or more percent increase in milk production, says Tom Kilcer of CCE Rensselaer County. "The value of wide swath harvesting to farmers is more than $40 per ton of dry matter fed as silage." Kilcer is credited with initiating research into the benefits of wide swathing for making an on-farm feed source more easily digested by cows.

Extension educators harvested first-cut haylage with a nine-foot wide swath disc mower on the St. Lawrence County dairy farms of Bernie Moulton and Jon Greenwood. They also cut narrow swaths with a mower and finger-type conditioner, used a mower-conditioner fitted with a wide swath kit mounted behind the conditioner, and used a mower-conditioner to cut a narrow swath that was immediately tedded out to 100 percent of cut width.

For comparison, haylage was also harvested from narrow windrows that were left to dry overnight. Analysis of the wide and narrow cut haylage samples is underway at Cornell labs. The extremely dry days on which the hay was cut may skew the first year data.

"Our quality analysis is not yet complete, but we expect, because of the unusually fast drying times, that all treatments, both narrow and wide swath will ensile well. Scientifically, however, we need to reserve judgment until more data can be obtained for comparative evaluation under different cutting and climate conditions," Cherney says.

Dairymen Jon Greenwood of Greenwood Dairy, Canton, and Bernie Moulton of Paradise Valley Farm, Madrid, say the project is a good start toward learning if the haylage harvesting technique of wide swath mowing without conditioning will help North Country farmers.

Greenwood says, "Same day harvesting gives us an advantage over the next day's weather. The project results should help us answer the questions of how important is conditioning or is it necessary. Whatever practice we use needs to produce a high quality forage and easily marry the research data with on-farm practicality."

Moulton, who also custom harvests hay, says, "If we learn that we can cut better quality forages to feed and buy less grain, we will save on feed costs. I am looking forward to the results of the quality analysis and to find out how much grass we can expect to mow in the morning and have harvested by night in one day."

CCE St. Lawrence County Field Crops Educator Peter Barney says farmers who bale dry hay are calling to ask if wide swathing might also speed the process for producing early-cut baled hay to feed on the farm and to sell.

"Dairy farmers looking to improve their profitability by feeding high quality forage are interested in the results of this project. If a farmer can harvest quality feed the same day, eliminating the variables that Mother Nature brings in the weather and the plant's exposure overnight, wide swathing will be a good thing. We need to wait for Dr. Cherney's final report on how well wide swathing captures quality and if the quality gain makes the wide-swathing system, the labor commitment and the possible purchase of new equipment profitable."

The Northern New York Agricultural Development Program funds research and education outreach for Essex, Clinton, Franklin, St. Lawrence, Lewis and Jefferson counties. A final report on the wide-swath haylage project in Northern New York is expected later this year. For more information, go online to www.nnyagdev.org.

On Bernie Moulton's St. Lawrence County dairy farm, Cornell Cooperative Extension educators harvest first-cut alfalfa-grass haylage using a nine-foot pull-type mower-conditioner with a wide swathing kit attachment. Photo: Cornell University

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Economies of Scale

Economies of Scale are Available Not Just to Large Farm Operators, but to Small Farm Families Willing to Adopt a Different Lifestyle.

By Bill Henning

The results of USDA's report on the number of farms in the US for 2005 aren't that surprising. The number of farms with gross annual sales under $250,000 declined by 0.8%. USDA defines farms in this category as "small." The number of farms with annual sales over $500,000 increased by 3.8%.

This report substantiates a trend that has been continuing for many years. In his 1918 text book Farm Management, G.F. Warren of Cornell University told us, "But so long as farmers become more efficient, we will need a smaller and smaller percent of the population engaged in farming."

For the young person yearning to be a farmer, not a farm hand, all this is far from encouraging. How can young people today afford to pursue an occupation where the economies of scale seem so stacked against them?

But contrary to the paradigm so often presented by the agricultural economists, there are actually two economies of scale. And they are at opposite ends of the spectrum.

The economy of scale so often referred to involves massive inflows of money for mega-farms with lots of land, hundreds to thousands of cows, gigantic machinery, numerous employees, public relations challenges, multi-lingual capabilities, and a never ending race to get bigger before the other mega-farms get too much bigger than you. This paradigm says if you're not getting bigger you're going backward. Get big or get out!

However, today's agriculture still offers opportunities for efficiency of scale at the other end of the spectrum. To take advantage of this economy of scale, though, your earnest desire to have your own farm might well be tested.

The test that many farms have failed over the years is simply that of maintaining the cost of family living. Of all farm costs none has escalated nearly as much as the cost of providing for the family. The real culprit in this expense is the cost of wants as opposed to needs. In this world of mass communication so many people are left believing they must have what everyone else is thought to have: cell phones, snowmobiles, designer clothes, eating out, football games… The list goes on and on.

On the other hand, many people have found that a "no frills" life can be a rewarding one. One such New York farm family I know has lived comfortably, but simply, for over twenty years. They sent all three children through college. They never milked more than 35 cows and still see no reason to milk more. Another left a position as a physicist with NASA to support his family with just 8 Jersey cows and direct marketing. The possibilities can expand significantly when the focus is on meeting needs and weeding out the wants.

Accomplishing enough with very little often takes advantage of the opposing economy of small scale. If something needs to be built some people will start sawing their own lumber. With help from the community, they will do their own construction. Firewood might be the cheapest way to heat the home. Milking by hand might be an acceptable way to eliminate a significant up front cost. Some folks still harvest their ear corn by hand. And, from just one corn seed, the return can be 100 fold. The family garden extends this experience while cutting out all the middlemen. The point is simple - we have been provided abundant opportunities to meet our NEEDS.

This is not a path for the faint of heart. If all this sounds laborious – you're right. But then these folks don't need to pay for a gym for exercise. If it sounds like low return per hour of work, some people's accounting involves more than dollars. For those with an occupational passion, work is simply an enjoyable part of life. If it sounds like a life of deprivation, happiness in the pursuit of a dream is not the experience of a deprived person.

What might seem like a mundane task or a waste of time to some just might be the fulfilling means to an end for someone else. Whether or not you want to farm, how you make your desire your reality, and exactly how you want to farm is your own particular choice. Weigh your options and your risks. You are only limited by your imagination.

And about that trend, the opportunities for small-scale farms are greater today than they were in 1918.

Bill Henning and his wife Kathleen operate a grass-based beef and sheep farm in the Finger Lakes region of New York. He is also the Small Farms Specialist with PRO-DAIRY/CCE-NWNY Dairy, Livestock, and Field Crops Team.

MARKETING

Customers vs Consumers

Even if You're a Direct Marketer, They're Not Necessarily the Same

By Bernadette Logozar

Are you a small-scale, diversified farmer? Do you grow or raise a variety of agricultural products? Do you sell these products directly to customers either through a farm stand, roadside stand or at the farmers market?

If so, then you are a "direct market farmer," even if you sell only a portion of what you produce on your farm directly to customers. Most of the folks I work with are selling their products directly to their customers…hence they can all be pooled under the banner of "direct marketers."

It doesn't really matter if you are selling freezer lamb, beef, chicken, fruits, vegetables, eggs, cheese, jams and jellies, honey, yarn, maple syrup, hay or whatever… for ANYONE who sells directly to their customers, there are certain skills and knowledge that cross commodity and industry lines. Now notice I did not say "consumers". And the reason for that is there is a difference between "customer" and "consumer."

What is the difference between customer and consumer? And why should I care?

Often these terms are used interchangeably, and buyers are often in fact both consumers and customers. However, the distinction can be made around the fact that a customer is the one who purchases and pays for a product or service. The consumer is the ultimate user of the product or service, however she or he may not have paid for the product or service.

A simple example can highlight the difference between customer and consumers. Let's say you have started a cheese-making business and are trying to develop some wholesale accounts at small groceries and specialty food stores in your region. As far as your wholesale business is concerned, your customers are the dairy-department buyers at the stores you want to sell to. Your consumers, on the other hand, are the individuals who will actually eat the cheese.

Now, in terms of its marketing effort, who should you target, the customer or the consumer? In reality – you need to understand the needs and wants of both the customer and the consumer. You need to develop a strong understanding of the needs of the retail food stores in terms of their requirements for purchasing cheese, including packaging, labeling, pricing, delivery, and payment systems.

You also need to understand the needs and wants of the consumer. How are tastes changing? Are consumers happy with the taste of your product? Is the packaging attractive? It would be a good idea to get your customer -- the food store buyer – to help you better understand your consumers.

In essence, your customer is the individual doing the purchasing, while the consumer is the individual that is ultimately the end-user of the product or service. If you are selling directly to the end consumers via a farm stand, roadside stand, or farmers' market, your customer and consumer is one in the same.

Even direct market farmers need to understand who your customers and consumers are, what they want and how much they are willing to pay for it. This is the first step in market analysis.

You can find more helpful marketing tips at www.tutor2u.net.

Bernadette Logozar is Rural & Ag Economic Development Specialist with Cornell Cooperative Extension of Franklin County. She can be reached at 518-483-7403 or bel7@cornell.edu.

RESOURCE SPOTLIGHT

Northeast SARE Farmer Grants

The Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program has a Farmer Grant program for eligible full- and part-time commercial farmers. This program works on the assumption that farmers, with the right kind of support, can conduct on-farm experiments that will make interesting, important contributions to the sustainability of farms across the Northeast. Here are answers to some basic questions about the program.

WHAT DOES SARE MEAN BY " SUSTAINABLE?"
To be considered sustainable, a project must improve profits, advance environmental stewardship, and benefit the wider farm community.

WHAT'S INVOLVED IN APPLYING FOR A GRANT?
Farmers develop their ideas and write the grant application, but SARE also requires that a technical advisor review each proposal. Typically, this is an extension agent, a crop consultant, or other professional. Being a technical advisor involves talking with the farmers as they develop a viable plan, reading the proposal, checking in periodically once a project is up and running, and perhaps helping a farmer tell others about the project, often through a flyer, extension newsletter, or a web summary of the results.

CAN I BE COMPENSATED FOR MY TIME?
Grant funds can be used to pay the farmer for time spent on the project, and the technical advisor, outside consultants, and other collaborators can also be compensated.

WHAT'S THE ROLE OF AN EXTENSION AGENT?
Extension educators are often a good judge of who is most likely to be a strong applicant, and they can help deliver SARE program dollars to farmers with experience, imagination, and farming skills. An agent's help can improve a farmer's chances of getting a grant. The educator should allow time to read the farmer's draft proposal carefully, comment on it, and sign the final proposal.

After that, the farmer should substantially run the project. Some farmers without internet access may need help in sending in reports, and it's not uncommon for an agent to write up project results for a newsletter or a web site posting as part of an outreach plan. Farmer-run projects often result in fresh, interesting copy for regional and statewide publications.

HOW LONG DO THESE PROJECTS RUN?
Most Farmer Grants happen over the course of one growing season, although some run longer. Since the awards are capped at $10,000, there is a natural limit on how much effort the award can support. If a project shows continued promise or raises new, interesting questions, the farmer can continue the work by applying for another grant.

WHAT KINDS OF PROJECTS GET FUNDED?
We have funded projects that explore new marketing and production techniques, pest management, cover crops, composting, agroforestry, new crop trials, bee health and alternative pollinators, new tool development—you name it. Projects must test a genuinely new idea, or give a new twist on an old one, and show evidence of good planning. We won't fund projects that allow farmers to merely adopt a proven sustainable technique—SARE money is reserved for innovation and exploration.

Past projects, with brief descriptions, are posted to the Northeast SARE web site. Go to www.uvm.edu/~nesare and click on "Project Reports" at the top of the page. Then set your search for "Northeast" and "Farmer Grants." There are more than 500 summaries and descriptions posted, so you may want to narrow your search by using a keyword or looking at projects only in your state.

WHAT IF THE PROJECT DOESN'T GO AS PLANNED?
Some projects don't—this is the price of innovation. SARE accepts that new ideas are risky and not all new ideas work out. But keep in mind that what others might see as failure we tend to see as useful information, and we ask that problems and unexpected results be reported to us frankly so that others can learn from them. Farmers who come up with a different approach to the original problem are encouraged to apply again.

IS THE APPLICATION COMPLICATED?
No—successful proposals consist of ten to twelve well-written paragraphs; the application format is straightforward and designed to be easy for people who have never written a grant proposal before. Each section is a question ("What do you want to do?" "How will you measure your results?" etc.), and there is also a how-to booklet that gives advice and examples and explains how budgets work. This booklet is posted on the Northeast SARE web site and is also available in print – see below.

Lou Lego is one the many Northeast farmers who have written successful SARE grant proposals. Here he is explaining to a group of 4-H teens how he manages apple pests, applying results of his on-farm research that has been supported by SARE.

WHAT IF I'M NOT A FARMER, BUT I HAVE A GREAT IDEA AND WOULD LIKE TO TEST OR DEMONSTRATE IT WITH SOME OF THE FARMERS THAT I WORK WITH?
You should apply for a SARE Partnership Grant. These awards allow you to work with one or more farmers, with you as the project manager, on their farms. You would be in charge of writing the application, running the project, collecting the data, and doing the reporting, and the funds would flow through your organization rather than their farm. Partnership Grants are also useful for those times when a farmer has an interesting idea but no time to manage a controlled test of it. Partnership Grants are specifically for extension and other agricultural professionals who are uniquely positioned to do on-farm research, marketing, and demonstration projects with farmers as cooperators.

I HAVE AN IDEA FOR A GRANT. IS THERE SOMEONE I CAN TALK TO?
Dale Riggs, the Farmer Grant specialist, can be reached at 518/733-0602, and her e-mail is farmergrants@taconic.net. She can answer questions, arrange for the mailing of printed materials, or direct you to the web site where the application and the how-to booklet are posted. She is also available to lead workshops on how to write a Farmer Grant.

HOW DO I GET MORE INFORMATION AND AN APPLICATION FORM?
To find out more, or to request printed copies of Farmer Grant materials, you can call the Northeast SARE office in Burlington, VT at 802/656-0471, or email us at nesare@uvm.edu.

To read and download Farmer Grant application materials online, go to www.uvm.edu/~nesare. In the left-hand column, select "Information for farmers and growers," and, under "What are you interested in?" select "Farmer Grants."

Readers Write

Readers may remember Alice Allen's article "KEEPING THE SMALL FARM LEGACY ALIVE" in our Summer 2004 issue. It was great to get the following update from her. Keep up the great work Alice!!

Dear Joanna,

Quite a bit of time has passed since I last got in touch with you! As always, though, The Small Farm Quarterly is a welcome addition to "Country Folks"! We've also been subscribers to Farming Magazine from Mt Hope, Ohio. David and Elsie Kline do a fantastic job.

The big news here is that we've just sold 32 head to an Amish farm in New Providence, PA and are transitioning to organic our tiny remaining dairy herd---long shot at best! And, we've been funded for the third year with the farm and conservation summer day camp (BLUE Team). With that grant came money for a feasibility study to determine if there is a local need for these projects, including the much anticipated "farm-based elder community" for which, believe it or not, there is a waiting list of elders!

The VT/NH Milk Marketing Study Group continues to organize meetings. This year our summer meeting featured none other than Dr. Kamyar Enshayan from the University of Northern Iowa! We were just thrilled to have him come to speak!. Best --

Alice Allen
Al-lens Farm
Wells River, Vermont

We also received the following message from Rita and Marty Reed, updating us on their daughter Meridith's accomplishments since her Youth Pages article was published in our very first issue, Summer 2003.

I thought that you might like a short up-date on Meridith's life. She is now 18 and, as is common for many home-schooled students, she completed high school a year early. She then started college at home for her Senior year of high school. She began working with "College Plus" in November and has completed 54 college credits as of this date. If she can stay on track she will finish her undergraduate communications degree by Sep. 2007. She then plans to attend a "brick and mortar" school to work on her Masters.

Meridith has had many honors during the past few years including the leading role in 2 musical productions and two trips to sing at the White House for Christmas. Most recently, she won a regional competition for both her vocal and dramatic presentations. She then went on to Chicago to win a gold medal in the vocal competition and was honored to win the overall competiton with her dramatic presentation.

As you can see, she has had a very full few years and we believe that many of her accomplishments can trace their roots back to beginnings in 4-H. Last year she was also honored with the "I dare you award" through 4-H. Well, enough parental bragging!!!

Marty and Rita Reed
Pennellville, NY

COMMUNITY/WORLD

The Taste of Place

By Roger Doiron

Editor's note: This article is reprinted with permission from the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston's quarterly magazine Communities & Banking, fall 2005, volume 16, number 4. The views expressed are not necessarily those of the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston or the Federal Reserve System. Information about organizations and upcoming events is strictly informational and not an endorsement.

"We must all hang together, or assuredly we shall all hang separately." Those words, spoken by Benjamin Franklin at the signing of the Declaration of Independence more than 200 years ago, could very well be the modern-day motto of the Northeast farm sector and its supporters as they look toward the future.

Despite the common misperception that the Northeast is a marginal agricultural region, Northeast farmers—and consumers— are finding new ways to hang together to keep the region's agriculture literally on the map.

The challenges are formidable. Farms and farmers continue to disappear from the Northeast landscape at an alarming rate. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's last Census of Agriculture, the Northeast lost 4.9 percent of its farms between 1997 and 2002.

When farms disappear, so do precious resources, both natural and human. During this same census period, the Northeast saw its total farm acres decrease by 6 percent, much of it gobbled up by suburban sprawl. At least as worrisome is the loss of expertise as farmers quit the business or retire without a successor.

In many ways, the challenges facing Northeast agriculture are not unique to our region. Communities across the nation are grappling with many of the same issues. What is unique to the Northeast are the solutions that are currently being put in place and the opportunities for the future.

SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL

It was Earl Butz, former U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, who famously offered his own success formula to farmers back in the 1970s: Get big or get out. For many farmers in the Northeast, however, getting big is simply not possible, given land values and the nature of the landscape. So farmers are developing alternatives to getting out.

A growing number of farmers in the Northeast have done well for themselves by taking Butz's advice and turning it on its head. Rather than trying to get big, many have succeeded by purposely staying small—in scale, in production methods, and in how they market their products to customers.

Similarly, rather than getting out of agriculture, many farmers from the region have gone into their communities to restore the farm to its rightful place at the center of a healthy society. For example, the Northeast leads the way in the growth of **Community Supported Agriculture** (CSA).

With CSA, a farm and a community of supporters create a partnership of mutual commitment. In the CSA model, farm supporters share both the benefits and the risks of the farm's operations by agreeing at the start of the growing season to buy a certain quantity of farm products for the year.

When a CSA farmer in New York was awarded a prestigious MacArthur Foundation fellowship in 2004 for her work on the development of local food systems, Cheryl Rogowski contended that it validated everyone in the CSA movement. "Farmers are often the economic engines for their communities," she said. "They provide a quality of life to the community by retaining the open spaces and rural character that so many people are seeking."

While Rogowski and her CSA colleagues have been redefining what a farm can be, Tod Murphy of Barre, Vermont, has been working to sustain local agriculture by reinventing the restaurant. Murphy is the founder, owner, and operator of the **Farmers Diner**, a 60-seat eatery that has attracted national attention by doing something unusual for a restaurant: It makes local and organic foods not only delicious but democratic.

No foie gras or truffles are mentioned anywhere on the menu, which instead features ordinary foods like omelets and milkshakes made from local organic eggs and milk, pancakes, bread and pastries made with local grains, and meats raised and cured in Vermont. Murphy wants the diner ultimately to source 100 percent of its ingredients from farms located within 50 miles of Barre. That's an ambitious goal. According to the WorldWatch Institute, the ingredients that most restaurants use travel on average 1,500 miles from field to fork.

Murphy enjoys seeing the steady flow of satisfied customers passing through his restaurant's doors, but his favorite part of the job is writing checks to farmers. He writes a lot of them. By 2003, the diner was buying $15,000 per month from local farmers and spurring local economic development and innovation. Murphy wants the diner to be the catalyst for farmers and food businesses to take chances with new products. "There's a lot of support in the community when the community understands that this is about the people they know and the places they drive by on the way to work in the morning," he says.

The success of private initiatives like the Farmers Diner is inspiring other food-serving establishments— schools, colleges, hospitals—to follow suit. In New England, colleges such as Bates, Middlebury, Yale, and Hampshire have attracted notice for their **farm-to-cafeteria** programs. A growing number of these programs use produce grown by the students themselves on educational farms that serve as training grounds for the next generation of farmers.

The momentum of the Northeast's local food sector is unmistakable, whether it's measured in the growing number of farmers' markets, CSA farms, or "buy local" campaigns. Such energy is essential for powering the region's diverse agricultural base in the face of growing national and international competition—but is it sufficient?

ONGOING FOOD-SUPPLY CHALLENGES

Food and agricultural professionals and advocates recognize that ensuring the long-term health of the Northeast's agricultural sector requires stronger regionally scaled cooperation among all the main actors in the food chain—producers, processors, distributors, retailers, and consumers—as well as support by policymakers.

Consider the **beef sector**. Telling the region's cattle farmers to think small and local may work for a few well-situated farms, but not most. Like other commodity farmers in the Northeast, beef producers are seeing their margins squeezed by larger farms from outside the region that have lower production costs. Some of the largest Midwestern feedlots have as many as 50,000 cattle each, more than all of Maine's beef farms combined.

Rather than racing Midwestern megafarms to the bottom through lower costs, more and more farmers in the Northeast are looking at new ways of rising to the top by offering premium products and by participating in innovative cooperative arrangements that give them better bargaining power with wholesale buyers.

One example of the latter is Wolfe's Neck Farm in Freeport, Maine. Wolfe's Neck Farm built a natural beef business from a single herd now up to 60 different family farms cooperatively selling beef to retail outlets across the region. The assets were transferred to **Pineland Farms Natural Meats Inc**. of New Gloucester in June, and the endeavor has continued to flourish under the new auspices.

Whether additional new forms of cooperation like this emerge will depend in part on the changing food policy landscape. There are still many state and federal regulatory barriers hindering the development of regional-scale agriculture and food enterprises. Regional policy networks like the **Northeast States Association for Agricultural Stewardship** are working to examine such barriers and create a regional identity among state-level lawmakers.

Similarly, members of the U.S. Congress from the Northeast have started thinking regionally through an informal policy coordination group known as the "**Eggplant Caucus**." The caucus has a big task ahead of it with a new federal farm bill expected in 2007. Historically, the Northeast has been more of a policy taker than a policy maker at the national level.

But a rising tide of pressure is coming from farmers in the region to make federal policy more relevant for their farms. One way this pressure is exerting itself is through a louder and more concerted push for reducing the size of government payments to the very largest farms, few of which are located in the Northeast. A new policy approach that rewards farmers for how they farm, not what or how much they farm, would be a transforming advantage for Northeast farmers.

Intelligent policies and new forms of regional cooperation can help ensure the future vitality of Northeast agriculture. In the end, though, the type and scale of our food system will depend at least as much on consumer choices. If there are enough eaters voting with their forks in support of locally and regionally based farms, then those farms will not only survive but thrive.

We are well on the way to developing a sense of Northeast "**food citizenship**." Many eaters express loyalty to locally grown products, and "eating regionally" is emerging as a highly marketable concept. With Cape Cod cranberries, Northeast beef, and restaurants that feature local produce, hanging together has never been so easy.

Roger Doiron is regional organizer for the Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group. He is based in Scarborough, Maine.

Resource Spotlight

National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture

Helping you stay informed and active in national agriculture policy

Do you care about protecting farmland, soil, clean water, and wildlife habitat? Ensuring the economic viability of farmers and rural communities? Providing opportunities for new farmers and ranchers? Fair treatment for farm workers? Equitable access to healthy food?

An excellent way to stay informed about these issues and ensure that you know when action is urgently needed to support them is to join the sustainable agriculture movement's electronic mailing list, managed by the National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture. This list makes it easy for you to speak out when your voice is needed most and turn your personal concerns into simple, effective advocacy for national change.

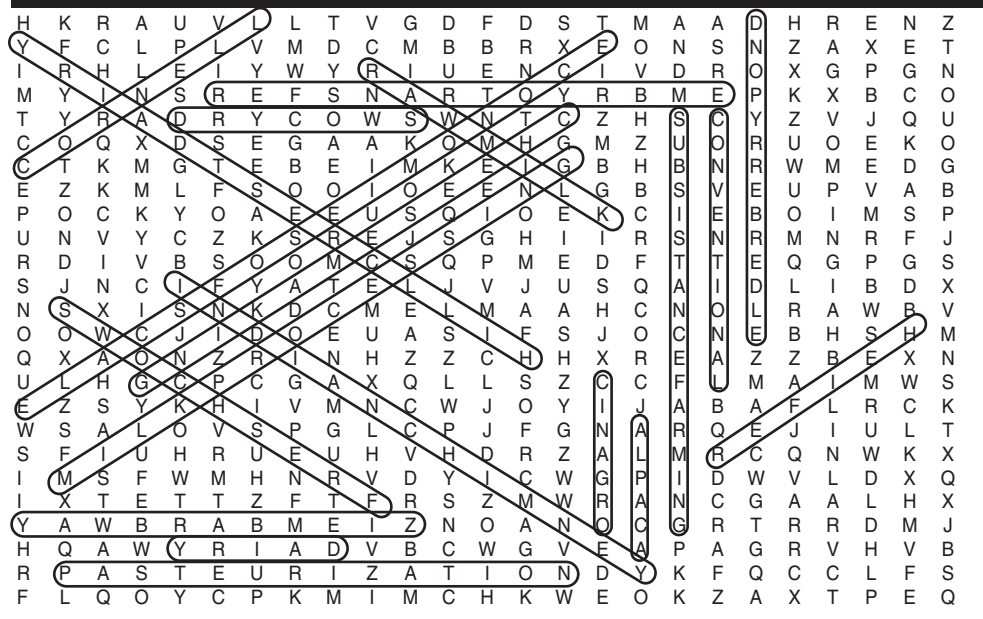
The National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture (www.sustainableagriculture.net) is a non-profit organization that unites a diverse nationwide network of hundreds of groups and individuals to shape national policies that foster a sustainable food and agricultural system -- one that is economically viable, environmentally sound, socially just, and humane. It works with extraordinary advocates in Washington who follow legislative details so that sustainable agriculture supporters nationwide don't have to. It provides grassroots groups and individuals with timely, crucial information on how they can change history by a simple phone call or letter.

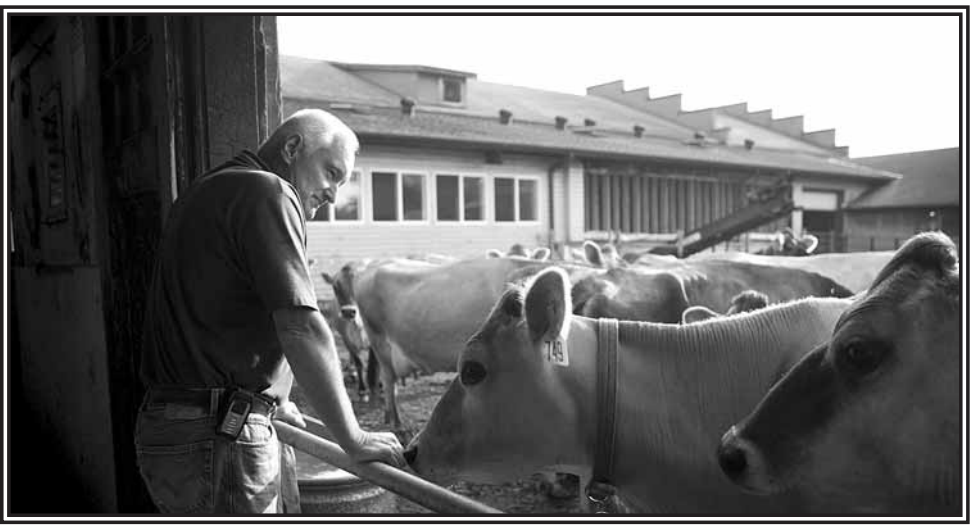
Together, our movement has created a record of impressive successes. For example, every year, we coordinate a grassroots campaign to get maximum funding for federal programs crucial to the sustainable agriculture movement. We help protect the meaning of the term organic. We fought successfully in the 2002 Farm Bill for programs that encourage and reward farmers for sustainable practices, and continue to pressure the USDA to implement them well.

The 2007 Farm Bill Is Coming Up!

With a new Farm Bill coming in 2007 your voice is needed now! So go online to www.sustainableagriculture.net/signUpAA.php to join the movement's e-mail list and learn more. Get involved, and support the effort to develop a new direction in federal agriculture policy that makes sense for both people and the land. We've done it before, but it takes all of us speaking out together!

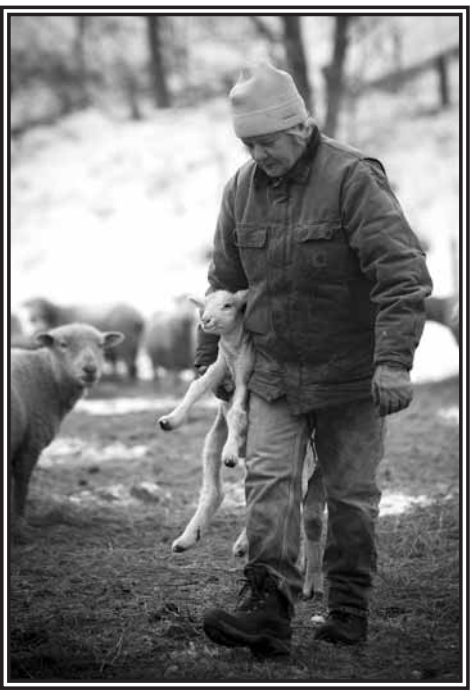
WORD SEARCH Solution





Smaller farms promote deeper connections between the farmers and their animals, and that leads to more humane and sustainable practices that are not always consistent with maximum production. High Lawn Farm's Jersey cows spend a significant portion of their lives on pasture and are only milked twice a day, compared with three or four times a day for some larger, higher capacity dairies.

The pigs at Flying Pigs Farm in Shushan, NY live in large areas in the woods and fields. Having plenty of space per pig keeps them clean and healthy, while their rooting tills the land that their waste fertilizes.



Raising animals on pasture often requires extra attention compared to raising animals in more controlled indoor environments. During the winter lambing season on Lila Berle's farm in Great Barrington, MA Lila must be on hand to transfer lambs and their mothers to the barn to protect the newborns from exposure.

From Field to Plate

Photo Essay by Jason Houston

I photograph farming to inspire conversations on the many related issues I feel are important. The subjects I choose to focus on and how I choose to photograph them direct those conversations. The farms depicted here represent alternatives to the way most meat animals are raised. They are not typical, and I say this to celebrate their distinction.

The reality for the majority of animals that provide for us is a hidden one of confinement and crowding, antibiotics and growth hormones, maxed-out production cycles, significantly shortened life-spans, inadequate socialization with other animals much less their human stewards, and sometimes even outright cruelty as workers struggle with and react to their own feelings about what they experience.

As we all know, the issues around meat are complex. To simplify it for myself, I was vegetarian for many years. I now eat meat, but only occasionally and only when it's from a farm where I know the farmers, the animals' living conditions, and how that animal died for me.

Jason Houston has been photographing farms in the North Eastern US for the past six years. His work has been published in print and online around the world and was recently on display at Yale University and in a solo exhibition at Spike Gallery in New York City. His most recent project was on agricultural issues and alternative approaches in southern Nicaragua with RARE Conservation. www.jasonhouston.com.

Pigs at North Plain Farm in Great Barrington, MA grow up, as they should, with their mothers and siblings.

This baby Large Black pig at Moon in the Pond Farm was stepped on by its mother and badly injured. On a small farm like this each and every animal is worth the extra effort. This piglet was sewn back up (on the kitchen table) and survived to return to its mother and siblings.

Kids and animals are a natural match, increasing the quality of life for both. Small-scale farms are safe and manageable with children, and taking care of the animals develops a sense of stewardship that will guide the child's decisions for years to come.

The chickens at Crazy Wife Farm in Alford, MA are completely free ranging. The eggs with their deep orange yolks and strong shells are coveted at the corner store that sells them.

The Scottish Highland Cattle, raised for beef at Moon in the Pond Farm in Sheffield MA, live on diverse pasture all their lives, often supplementing a grass diet with any number of wild plants from the edges of the woods.

New Farmers

Getting a Head Start

Farm Service Agency Youth Loans Help Prepare These Two Young Farmers For Success.

By Thomas Becker

The Farm Service Agency has a Youth Loan program to assist young future farmers in getting starting in the agriculture industry. This past spring, Peter Martens applied for a Youth Loan to plant organic corn, oats, soybeans, peas and spelt in conjunction with his parent's farming operation.

GOING WITH THE GRAIN

This is the second year for Peter's operation under the Youth Loan program. He had a successful season in 2005 through the use of sound management and some solid guidance from experienced mentors. These included his parents Klaas and Mary Howell Martens, Penn Yan agriculture teacher and FFA advisor John Kriese, and Farm Service Agency staff.

Peter's profit from 2005 enabled him to purchase a tractor and to increase the amount of rental property for 2006. Peter is up to about 180 acres under his control. The Youth Loan has helped Peter understand break even points along with using crop insurance to minimize risk and safeguard against natural disasters.

Every year, as part of the loan application, the FSA loan officer develops a farm business plan with Peter that both he and his mentors are comfortable with. Peter is able to lock in prices for the crops he will be producing through Lakeview Organic Grain, a Penn Yan feed mill owned and operated by his parents.

The Youth Loan program helps Peter pull resources together to gain the knowledge and experience he'll need to pursue farming on his own. Peter also serves as Treasurer of the Penn Yan Future Farmers of America chapter and plans to participate until graduating from high school.

SPRINGING AHEAD WITH HEIFERS

Peter's sister Elizabeth Martens also received a Youth Loan this spring for a heifer raising project. Through her research, Elizabeth discovered that certified organic Holstein springing heifers have a high market demand and pay a premium above conventional heifers.

With the assistance of FFA advisor John Kriese, her parents and the FSA loan officer, Elizabeth was able to develop a farm business plan that involved purchasing 4 open dairy heifers, feeding them organic grain grown on the family farm along with some purchased organic feeds, breeding the heifers via artificial insemination, and selling them as certified organic springing heifers.

Elizabeth diligently researched the requirements for organic certification of milk cows and developed a time line to ensure that organic certification would be obtained prior to sale. She had to carefully evaluate her costs and the tools available to minimize risk. Elizabeth was able to get some of the sample grains from Lakeview Organic Grain for free to help lower her feed expense, and she was able to add the cattle to her parent's farm insurance policy.

Elizabeth's long term goal is to study veterinary medicine. She wants to establish several agriculture enterprises to help finance her college. Currently, her responsibilities on the home farm include taking care of the family animals, assisting with the grain crops and helping to bale hay. She is also active in FFA.

With the help of an FSA Youth Loan and some dedicated mentors, Elizabeth Martens and her brother Peter are developing their own farm enterprises while still in high school and living at home.

Thomas Becker is a Farm Loan Officer with USDA's Farm Service Agency in Bath, NY. You can reach him at 607-776-7398 or by email at Thomas.becker@ny.usda.gov.

Cows and Crops

Animal Welfare -- What DO People Think?

By Larry E. Chase

Animal welfare is a hot topic among some producers and consumers of animal products. But what does the general public think about farm animals and their well being?

We can get some insight from a survey conducted in 2004 by the Social Responsibility Initiative at Ohio State University. Andrew Rauch and Jeff Sharp from the Department of Human and Community Resource Development were the authors.

Surveys were sent to 3,500 randomly selected Ohioans. The response rate was 56%. The majority of the respondents lived in a city or suburb (62%) and about 4% resided on a farm. Here's what they found:

92% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that it is important for farm animals to be well-cared for.
85% indicated that the quality of animal lives is important even though some animals are used for meat production.
81% believe that the well-being of farm animals is just as important as the well-being of pets.
75% of the respondents felt that farm animals should be protected from physical pain.
Only 33% were interested in learning more about farm animals.
47% said they agreed or strongly agreed that increased regulation of the treatment of farm animals is needed.
59% said that they would be willing to pay more for meat, poultry or dairy products labeled as coming from humanely treated animals. Within this group, 43% said they would be willing to pay 10% more for these products, and 12% said they would pay 25% more.

These results demonstrate that people in Ohio are concerned about how producers treat their animals. It is interesting that a majority are willing to pay more for products from "humanely treated" animals. It would be helpful to have similar data for the Northeast.

Reprinted from the January 2006 Dairy Agent Update, from Cornell University's Total Dairy Management Program.

Larry E. Chase is a Professor in the Department of Animal Science at Cornell University.